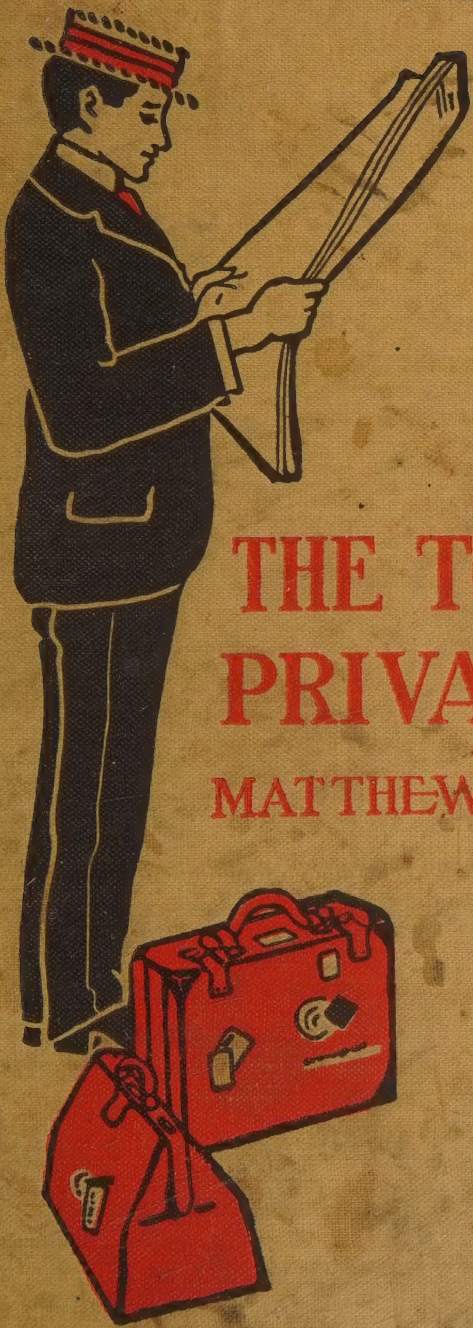

THE TOUR OF A PRIVATE CAR

MATTHEW WHITE JR

a Wagenknecht

HOLDING THE LANTERN ALOFT, BRECK LED THE WAY INTO THE ABANDONED HOTEL.

THE
Tour of a Private Car

BY

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"MY MYSTERIOUS FORTUNE," "THE YOUNG EDITOR,"
"ERIC DANE," ETC.

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Tour of a Private Car

THE TOUR OF A PRIVATE CAR;

OR,

WHAT BECAME OF THE STARLING.

CHAPTER I.

BEFORE THE START.

"I THINK most decidedly, Breck, that you'd better accept."

Mrs. Eastman stifled a sigh as she spoke, for the decision she was counseling her son to make meant a long separation between them.

"But, mother," rejoined Breck, leaning forward in his chair to toy with the skeins of worsted in his mother's lap, "that will leave you and Helen alone all summer, and prevent my getting a permanent situation here."

"Didn't you tell me that Mr. Bell, provided he was pleased with you during the trip, promised you a position in his Philadelphia house?"

"But, I may not please him, and then——"

"There would have been the same 'then' in the event of your not pleasing any employer here in Crescent with whom you might obtain a place. And as for leaving Helen and me by ourselves, your Uncle Dick's ship will be in next month, and as she is not to sail again for six weeks, we can have him here with us all that time. But how is it you are arguing so persistently on the other side, now, my son? When you first came to me with the news, you were wildly enthusiastic over the prospect of the trip. What has changed you? Don't you really care about going, on thinking it over?"

Breck's handsome face flushed slightly. He dropped the worsted and ran his fingers once or twice through his hair.

"Of course I want to go as badly as ever, so far as the trip itself is concerned," he rejoined finally, "but——"

And here he stopped.

"Well " and a worried look chased away the smil with which his mother had at first awaited his reply.

Breck noticed this, and resolved to give her all his confidence at once.

"This is the way of it," he burst out. "Since Mr. Bell spoke to me on the matter yesterday morning,

I have found out that his nephew Deane is to be of the party. You know he lives with Mr. Bell, and I've run across him several times when I've been to the house and—well, he's a cad of the lowest description, and I'm afraid there'd be war if we had to live under the same car roof."

Breck got up, and with his hands plunged in his trousers pockets, began to pace up and down the room.

"Why, Breck!" exclaimed Mrs. Eastman. "I am surprised. It isn't like you to pick a quarrel with anybody."

"Oh, there isn't any quarrel," was the reply. "It's only Deane's manner that makes me understand as plainly as if he had told me, that he doesn't care to associate with a fellow who makes money by taking shorthand notes for his uncle."

"Why, that's absurd——"

"Of course it is, and that is why I don't care to have anything more to do with a fellow who can be such a snob," broke in Breck, who seemed to be all wrought up. "We knew one another at school and he was civil enough there, but now, because he's booked for college and I've got to begin at once to earn my living, the dude passes me on the stairs without so much as a nod."

"But you surely don't crave the acquaintance or

companionship of such a poor spirited youth as that," said Mrs. Eastman.

"Indeed not, but don't you see if I go on this tour, it'll be worse than ever. I'm as proud as Lucifer," and Breck shot a glance at the Eastman coat of arms in its frame over the doorway, "so I wouldn't like to answer for the consequences if Deane should rile me beyond a certain limit."

"And you are going to let this stand between you and what may turn out to be the great opportunity of your life?" remarked Mrs. Eastman quietly, when Breck had resumed his seat. Surely, my son, you have stronger control of yourself than that. Now that you have put your reason into words, doesn't it strike you as a trifle—well, frivolous and childish?"

Breck looked grave, his blue eyes fixed steadily on the landscape framed by the window opposite him, across which just then a train of cars flashed, away off on the hillside. "Then he drew a long sigh, squared his shoulders, and getting up said frankly:

"It *was* foolish and I *will* try to do a bit of self conquering. I felt all the time that I'd everlastingly regret it if I didn't go with Mr. Bell, and yet it did seem as if I could not voluntarily put myself where that fellow could lord it over me—as I know he will —every day while I'm gone. But I'll try and remem-

ber this talk whenever he's around, and now I must go tell Mr. Bell that I've decided."

While Breck is bound on this errand we will snatch the opportunity to make the reader better acquainted with him. He is just turned seventeen, but looks older, and from having been "head of the house" at home ever since his father's death five years previous, has a certain manly air about him that has tended not a little towards putting him in the good graces of Mr. Archibald Bell.

The latter owned the handsomest place in Crescent, and was accounted the wealthiest man in the town. He was engaged in the shipping business in Philadelphia, although he spent a great deal of his time at his home in the suburban village.

Staying so much away from his office, he had a great deal of mail sent to his house, and the labor of answering it at last became so great that he felt the need of a typewriter and stenographer in the country as well as at his place of business in town. Chancing to mention the fact one day within the hearing of Mr. Marshall, the principal of the Crescent Academy, the latter at once spoke of Breckenridge Eastman, who the year before had won a writing machine by canvassing for a paper, and had since taught himself shorthand.

Now Mr. Bell had often observed Breck in church

and on the street, and liked his looks, so he sent for him to come on trial, with the result that he was engaged at a good salary to report for duty at "Lawnhurst" three times a week. The money thus earned was exceedingly welcome to the little household in the elm-shaded cottage, for while the income left the widow Eastman had been sufficient for their needs while the children were small, now they were approaching maturity, there were many desires that perforce must go ungratified.

And now Mr. Bell had taken it into his head that his wife, who was something of an invalid, would be benefited by a tour through the West. So he had built a private car which rumor made into a perfect palace on wheels, and had just asked Breck to accompany him, at an increased salary, on the trip.

The objective point of the tour was to be Los Angeles, Carlifornia, but the journey would be a leisurely one, with stops of more or less length at Chicago, Denver, the Yellowstone, and other points of interest. The entire tour would occupy about three months, and Mr. Bell had arranged to have all important letters forwarded to him at different points along the route, and it was to aid him in attending to this correspondence that Breck had been asked to become a member of the party.

"My stars, what a lucky dog you are, Breck East-

man!" exclaimed his school chum, Laird Grayland, clapping him on the shoulder as he left the Bell grounds on his return home on the afternoon of which we were speaking. "Why that trip of yours will be just play all the time, and to think that you're to be paid for enjoying yourself, too! This comes of working like a trooper, I suppose, over that phonography, the way you did last winter many a night when I wanted you to come skating with the rest of us. We had our apples then; now you come in for your peaches and cream. But speaking of peaches and cream, do you remember that picnic last August, and that very pretty girl you escorted home when the shower came up and sent us back before her carriage had been ordered?"

"Of course I do, and she was as bright as she was pretty, which can't always be said of your beauties, you know. But what of her?"

"Well, you told me yesterday that you didn't know who was to be on the private car outside of Mr. Bell's family, so perhaps it will be a piece of news to you that Marie Granville is going."

Certainly Laird could not have asked that his tidings might have created a profounder impression. Breck stopped short in the street and turned on him with a long-drawn out "Wh-a-t?" expressive of the deepest

astonishment. Then resuming his walk, he asked quickly:

"Who told you? How do you know?"

"My sister. She had it from Mattie Coombs, who says that Marie's mother is some relation to Mrs. Bell. Fanny had a letter from Marie herself this morning, telling about her good luck. And now, Breck, I must congratulate you again on yours."

But Breck wondered within himself whether it was going to be such good luck after all, for in spite of him the dark image of Deane Bell would loom up in his mind.

CHAPTER II.

A BAD BEGINNING.

As Mr. Bell had not made his proposition to Breck until a week before the tour was to begin, there was not much time left for preparation. Indeed, so many things had to be attended to in the interval that when Monday came round he had but a confused recollection of how he had passed the intervening days.

Of Deane during this period he saw nothing, although he was several times at the Bells'. He understood that young Bell was in New York, visiting friends, and would not join the party until the day of departure.

In his absence, the bugbear of his prospective companionship faded almost entirely from Breck's mind, and he gave himself up unreservedly to making the most by anticipation out of what all his friends termed his "splendid luck."

"Why, any one of our crowd of fellows would consider it a big thing if he could only get a chance

to have a peep inside of one of those 'rolling palaces,' and here you are actually to live in one for three months. I only hope it won't set you up so high that when you come home you can't get your chin down low enough to nod to us;" and Laird, who headed a delegation of Breck's school friends that had repaired to the Crescent station Monday morning to see him off, pretended to look very sober as he added the last clause.

"Why didn't they make the start from here instead of Philadelphia," Rob Kenton wanted to know, "so we could all see at least the outside of the car!"

"Because we start out on the other line," replied Breck, "and we couldn't very well get the Starling transferred in time to make the train Mr. Bell wants to catch."

"The Starling? Is that the name of the car?" put in Walter Powers.

"Yes; it was a fancy of Mrs. Bell, and is named for an English bird she has in a cage at the house. But here comes the train. Good-bye, fellows. I must let mother and Helen have the last of me, you know."

The parting was a wrench, of course, but it was soon over, and Breck was being whirled over the rails toward the Quaker City, where the Bells themselves had passed Sunday.

Eleven o'clock was the hour set for the departure of the Starling on its first flight to Chicago, and at half-past ten Breck was riding through the city on a cable car to the Broad Street station.

As he stepped off on the asphalt pavement in front of the entrance, he noticed two ladies just leaving a hansom.

"Marie Granville and her mother!" he murmured to himself. "I wonder if she will remember me?" was his next reflection, as he hurried forward to find out, and make himself useful in carrying her bundles, of which latter she seemed to have an oversupply.

The next instant their eyes met, and at once Miss Marie bowed and smiled, and seemed struggling to get a hand free to offer Breck.

"Allow me to assist you," said the latter, as he took the box of candy which seemed to be one too many for her, and then shook hands.

They both laughed over this expedient, and then she asked quickly, noticing the satchel he carried: "Oh, Mr. Eastman, are you going on the Chicago Special too?"

Breck was about to explain, but at that instant her mother, who had gone some steps ahead, called to her, and he had only the chance to answer "Yes."

"How jolly!" she exclaimed. "So are we. You must come into our car and pay us a nice long call.

The Starling's the name, and it's to be the last one, I believe. And oh, mamma, I want to introduce my friend, Mr. Eastman. I met him at the picnic at Bryn Mawr last summer. And isn't it funny, he's going on the same train with us?"

"I must tell her at once," thought Breck. "I wonder what she'll say when she finds out?"

But there was no opportunity to explain things now. Mrs. Granville was nervous, fearing they were late, and kept pushing ahead so fast that Marie's entire attention was absorbed in trying to keep her in sight in the crowd. Breck still retained the candy box, and of course had the delivery of this to serve in the girl's eyes as an excuse for accompanying them even after Mr. Bell had hurried up to meet them in the waiting-room.

Leaving her mother with him as they entered the car, and having given over her remaining bundles to the colored steward, who had been sent to get them, Marie dropped back with Breck, and said laughingly as the latter made no move to give up the box: "Oh, I see you want to claim freightage now. Well, come in and I will promise to open the box for you at once."

Poor Breck was getting into rather an awkward fix. If he could only have told her just how things stood in the first place!

"I'll do it just as soon as we get inside," he resolved, "and before she has a chance to open this box."

But before they reached the main compartment, some one came rushing down the passage way. And then Breck heard Deane's voice:

"Why, Marie, why didn't you let me know which way you were coming, and I could have met you?"

"How do you do, Deane? We got along beautifully with a hansom to help us out, and then when we got here we had the good fortune to meet my friend, Mr. Eastman, who—oh, excuse me, you don't know Mr. Eastman."

Deane turned on Breck with that supercilious curl of the lip the latter had seen so often, and then said carelessly:

"Oh, yes, I do. He's uncle's typewriter. Have you seen your room yet? It's a beauty."

But Marie seemed not to hear him. She was looking at Breck, who, with the candy box held out to her, stood biting his lips and looking very handsome from the rush of color that Deane's rude speech sent surging up into his cheeks.

As soon as the other paused, and he saw that Marie was looking expectantly at him, he began:

"Yes, Miss Granville, I would have explained

before, but I didn't have the chance. Mr. Bell has asked me to help him with his letters, and that is the reason I am going on the same train with you—in the same car."

Breck could have bitten his tongue out for adding this last, for it gave Deane the opportunity to bend forward and whisper, as Mr. Bell called to Breck: "But I'll see that he remembers his position, and doesn't annoy you."

Our hero ground his teeth together and clinched the fist that hadn't hold of the satchel—he had just handed the candy box to its owner. He heard every word as he crossed behind Deane to reach Mr. Bell, who was standing in the passage way on the opposite side of the parlor.

"I want to show you your room, Eastman," he said, and led the way toward the rear of the car.

"It's worse than I imagined it possibly could be," reflected poor Breck, "but it's all the more glory to conquer the 'mad' it inspires in me;" and he resolutely banisned the incident from his mind, and tried to fasten his attention wholly on the interior arrangements of the car.

And certainly they were well worth close examination, for the woodwork was of the most expensive sort, and through the doorways of the rooms they passed Breck caught glimpses of soft carpets, cur-

tained windows, "real" beds, and pictures on the walls the same as in a house.

"Here are your quarters," said Mr. Bell, pulling back a portière at the extreme rear of the car. "It was built for a friend of mine whom I fully expected to have go with us until a week ago, when he sent me word that the serious illness of his father would prevent his leaving. Make yourself at home here, and if you need anything you don't know how to get hold of, speak to Tom, the steward."

So saying, Mr. Bell hurried off, and Breck was left to inspect the apartment, which was certainly a very comfortable one, although quite small. It contained one window, a wash-stand with running water, an electric light bulb, and one easy-chair, beside the bed, which was built into the partition similar to a berth.

"Well, this is lots better than I expected," soliloquized Breck, as he began to unpack. "I had an idea that they might tuck me away in any little hole that came handy, and was all braced against it—better against that than I was against that nasty episode with Miss Granville. But I made up my mind I wouldn't think of it again."

Nor did he, until summoned to luncheon by Tom, when he found his place at the table set between Deane and Mr. Bell. As the latter on the one side was absorbed in his talk with Mrs. Granville on his

left, and as Deane never addressed a syllable to him during the meal, and took good care that Marie, who sat the other side of him, should not get a chance to, either, Breck felt decidedly like the traditional odd sheep, for Mr Bell's physician, whom he now found was to be of the party, wholly claimed *her* attention.

So young Eastman ate in silence, getting all the enjoyment he could out of watching the scenery through the large windows on either side.

Soon after lunch Mr. Bell claimed him for work with his mail, and when he finished this it was dark, and the train was nearing Harrisburg. He then wrote a letter to his mother, saying not one word of his bad beginning so far as Deane was concerned, but dilating at length on the beauty of the car, the coziness of his room, and the kindness of Mr. Bell.

There was quite an extensive library in the parlor, and, as his employer had invited him to make free use of it, Breck passed the evening in his room, reading "David Copperfield."

The next morning he passed the time till he was wanted by Mr. Bell in watching the scenery from the rear platform and chatting with Syd, the Starling's brakeman. The rest of the day went the same as its predecessor had done, and so it went on for a week, when they reached the Far West, and the Starling made its memorable disappearance.

CHAPTER III.

WHAT BROKE UP A GAME OF WHIST.

"YES, sir, it's a pretty heavy grade, and it's just as steep on the other side. Tipton's right at the top. That's where we lay over to-night."

Syd, the brakeman, was standing on the rear platform, where Breck had stepped out to view the scenery. The locomotive was laboring heavily, snorting its discontent at the extra work imposed on it by the steep incline of the roadway, which wound up the hillside in a series of the most picturesque curves.

"Look yonder, sir," went on Syd, tapping Breck on the arm and pointing off to the left and higher up the mountain.

"Well, what of it?" asked young Eastman, who did not see anything of special moment in the direction indicated.

He had been gazing on the opposite side, where

the track branched off to the left and ran seemingly into the very heart of the wilderness.

"The track we're on, sir. See it across there, just opposite to us, not more than a quarter of a mile away. It turns back on itself, you may say, and that's Tipton up there. Little bit of a place, but prettier than most of them."

"Where does that road go?" asked Breck, bringing his eyes back to the branching rails.

"Up to Power's Folly, as they call it, about three miles from here. A Mr. Power from San Francisco thought he would make a paying summer resort of the place. He put up a big hotel and did lots of advertising, but people said it was lonely and wouldn't come. So the whole thing fell through. Mr. Power went back to 'Frisco disgusted, and I hear they're going to take up the track in the fall. I ran over this line one summer; that is how I came to know about it."

A half hour later the Starling was lying side-tracked near the little Tipton station, the object of considerable interest to the juvenile population of the place. When the party finished dinner, Dr. Brisbane, who had been in Tipton before, proposed a walk to a point whence a fine view of the valley could be obtained.

The ladies, however, voted it too damp for them to venture out, so, promising to be gone only a little

while, Mr. Bell and the doctor started out, Deane going with them.

This last run had been a long one, all the way from Denver, so that they were glad of the opportunity to stretch their legs.

"Oh, Eastman," Mr. Bell paused at Breck's room to say, "I wish you would take those two letters you wrote for me this afternoon, and see if you can find a place to mail them. From all the doctor says I imagine we are going in quite the opposite direction from anything like the center of trade, if a place like Tipton can be said to possess any such thing."

Breck, glad of the opportunity for exercise, took his stick, walked through the dining-room, got the letters and started to fulfill his commission.

On the station platform he met Syd.

"I've got to go up in the village," the latter explained, "and find out where the ticket agent lives. Mr. Bell wants him to turn out early in the morning so as to telegraph to the junction for the express to stop and pick us up."

"Can you tell me whether there is a post-office here, and if so, how to find it?" inquired Breck.

"Straight up this street. I'll go for you if you like."

"No, thank you. I prefer the walk, and there's not much danger of getting lost in a town of his size."

So saying, Breck turned off to the left, inhaling deep

draughts of the pure mountain air and feeling grateful to Dr. Brisbane for recommending the "stop over" at the highest point on the road.

He had scarcely got out of sight when Deane came hurrying back to the car.

"I forgot to take my field-glass," he explained, adding: "you ladies had better change your mind and come."

"We can't go and leave your aunt alone," returned Mrs. Granville, "and you know it isn't advisable for her to go out in the night air."

"Where's the typewriter?"

Deane's lip curled slightly as he put the question, but he looked rather sheepish when Marie replied, with marked emphasis: "*Mr. Eastman's* gone to the post-office for Uncle Archibald."

"I'll stay myself, then," he declared the next minute.

"Oh, please don't on our account," exclaimed Marie. "We're perfectly safe here. Syd is always around, you know."

"But I'm going to stay all the same," rejoined Deane, unslinging his glass. "What do you say to a game of whist? You and I, Marie, against your mother and Gertrude? I know they both like it, and you and I don't get any show when uncle and the

doctor are here. I'll go and propose it to aunt. Shall I?"

"I'd like to play very much," assented Mrs. Granville, and as Deane went off to get Mrs. Bell, Marie pressed the electric button for Tom to bring the card table. There was no response. and when Deane came back with Mrs. Bell, he was sent forward to investigate.

He returned with his hair awry and the table under his arm.

"There's not a soul of them about," he reported. "I don't see even Syd. Had to poke about in the dark till I found this, for I don't know where to look for the burners to turn on the current."

"I suppose Tom and the cook have gone off to replenish the larder," said Marie, as she cut for deal.

"But its queer where Syd is."

The game began, and soon all four were wholly absorbed in it. Marie had a series of splendid hands, and as their score ran up, her spirits rose with it.

It was not a particularly scientific game, for there was a good deal of talking, and now and again peals of laughter would echo through the car.

Marie and Deane beat the first game, and were in a fair way to win the second.

It was on the last round. Mrs. Granville played the king of trumps, the ace had not been out, and

there was a good deal of excitement as to which side had it. Deane waved his last card aloft, and, with a triumphant glance around, was about to play it when Marie suddenly threw her card on the table, face downward, and sprang to her feet.

"Deane, quick!" she cried. "The car! It's moving. Why haven't we noticed it? See what it is."

She hurried to the window, knelt down on the floor, and putting a hand on either side of her temple, peered out into the darkness.

Mrs. Bell fell back in her chair, the color all gone out of her face, while Mrs. Granville, with a wild look in her eyes, went rushing into the next compartment for the maid, crying, "Estelle, Estelle!"

To an onlooker it would have been ludicrous enough, as apparently there was nothing in the world the matter. The next instant, however, Deane came back, white as ashes, pushing by the shoulder a little boy of nine or ten with his left hand, while his right hung limp by his side and a tiny stream of blood trickled from the wrist.

"The grade!" he gasped in a hoarse whisper, going up to Marie. "Something has started the car. I've hurt my hand—and can't put on the brake."

Marie sprang to her feet and talking fast, asked,

"How did you do it, and this boy? Where did he come from?"

"Found him on the platform. Think he must have been fooling with the brake. The door stuck, and in trying to open it my hand went through the window. But where are you going?"

A sharp cream behind them apprised both of the fact that Mrs. Bell had crept up unnoticed and heard all. Marie turned to see her reeling toward the floor, and put out her arms just in time to catch her.

"To put on the brake myself," and hurrying past him the girl, in her white gown, ran down the aisle and out upon the platform.

Deane followed her and then Estelle came, her teeth, fairly chattering from fear, and uttering such whimpering cries that Marie turned on her almost fiercely.

"Stop!" she commanded. "That does no good. Only takes away what little strength we have. Which way ought I turn it, Deane?"

"To the right, I think. What an idiot I was to hurry so!"

By this time the car was speeding down the incline at terrific speed. The rush of air caused the ribbon at Marie's throat to stand out straight as she bent over the iron wheel, her small white hands gripping the rim helplessly. For the car had now gained such headway that it would require a firm, determined check to break it.

CHAPTER IV.

DOWN THE GRADE.

SEEING that the speed had in nowise been diminished, Deane threw himself desperately on the brake wheel, but the first wrench drew from him a cry of pain, and Estelle screamed as she saw a drop of blood on Marie's sleeve.

"Estelle, you come and help me!" commanded Marie. "Here, we will both take hold on this side."

She stepped to the right to make room, and at that instant the car swept around a curve, there was a swish of branches in Estelle's face, and she reeled toward the step.

With a half stifled cry she grasped the guard rail just in time, and for a second or two afterwards not one of the three stirred or spoke, the escape had been such a narrow one.

"Oh, Marie," groaned Deane, "what can we do? If only Syd were here. Or if it could be all over at

over at once. But this is awful! To go on and on, and know that it must end in a crash. And I am so helpless."

"But why must there be any crash? We are on the main track now, so there's no danger of our being dumped off an embankment. And it is so late that there may not be any more trains now. After we get to the level we must stop some time."

Marie spoke firmly, and insensibly the others imbibed courage and hope from her very tone.

"Come, let us go inside," said Deane. "We can do no good here. Besides, it is dangerous on these sharp curves. I have a time table in my pocket. I can soon tell about what trains are coming up. I think there can be none at this time."

The three went silently back through the passage way, Deane feeling in his pockets for the time table.

In the saloon they found Mrs. Granville kneeling by Mrs. Bell's side, plying the salts and a fan, while seated on the divan, his blue eves fixed in a sort of fascinated stare on the electric light bulb opposite him, was the boy Deane had found on the platform. He was rather a good-looking little fellow, but his clothes were well patched and his shoes coated with dust.

Marie noticed this much and then bent over Deane,

as he spread the time card out on the table amid the ruins of their whist game, and began to study it.

Inspired with hope, Estelle recovered herself sufficiently to pounce on the boy with the cry: "Was it you did all this, fooling with the brake? Do you realize it, and think that you may have doomed—doomed——" she stopped short and began to count on her finger tips.

The boy gazed up at her speechless and panic-stricken. Marie knew that she was reckoning up the number of souls aboard the car, and, in spite of the imminent peril of the situation, could not forbear a smile at the absurdity of the thing.

A sharp exclamation from Deane sobered her on the instant.

"The Eastern Express!" he cried, with his finger running down one of the columns of the time table. Then he snatched out his watch and looked at it.

The next instant he had sunk into a chair and dropped his face upon his hands on the table.

Marie quickly caught up the time table, studied it for an instant, then consulted her own watch.

"But it can't be possible," she broke out, touching Deane on the arm. "If that train had been coming up this way, surely the switch we were on at Tipton would not have been left open, otherwise it would have crashed into us as we lay there."

"By Jupiter, you're right, Marie!" exclaimed the other, lifting his head and looking at her, "I'm a fool to lose nerve so quickly. Here, let me see."

He drew the card toward him and bent over it again. Marie leaned on the table with her elbows, her breath coming hard, and a straight line running down her forehead. Probably never before had the decree of life or death hung on the solving of the labyrinth the average railroad time table presents to the traveler's gaze.

The next minute Deane gave a groan and pointed to a station half way down the column.

"See that's where the Express branches off," he said hoarsely. "It can't be more than four miles below Tipton, and at the rate we're going now, we'll soon have passed the junction. The Express is due there at 7:15. It's 7:10 now. We——"

Deane sprang up and hurried out through the passage way to the rear end. He was not a brave youth, and was too proud to let his cowardice be seen. Reaching the back platform, he let himself partly down over the end with a sort of blind hope that at the first signs of the crash he could drop to the ground and save himself.

Meanwhile Marie, in the main saloon, was trying to revive Mrs. Bell, and this done, to inspire her with some sort of hope. But her aunt only moaned, and,

burying her face in her hands, kept repeating, "Oh, Marie, Marie, it is dreadful! Why did I ever come?"

"I shall be as bad as she is in a minute if I stay here," thought Marie; and leaving her mother, who was nearly frantic herself, to try and soothe their hostess, she slipped out through the rear passage way to see what had become of Deane.

It was so dark that when she reached the platform, after glancing in the different rooms on the way, she at first did not perceive him of whom she was in search.

Then her eyes fell on the form clinging to the brake support in an attitude of such abject terror that she turned quickly away, while her thoughts involuntarily flew to Breck Eastman, as she drew a mental contrast between the natures of the two boys.

Retracing her steps, she was passing through the parlor on her way to the further end, when her glance took in the boy who, it was easy to surmise, was the cause of the incident that might turn out a tragedy.

He had retreated to the further end of the sofa, as far away as he could get from Mrs. Bell, whose frame was shaking with her sobs. He was trembling, too, and great tears were rolling down his cheeks.

"Poor little fellow!" murmured Marie. "He could not have known what he was doing, and it is

awful for him to be here with aunt going on that way. I'll take him with me;" and putting out her hand, she said, "Come."

The boy looked up at her for an instant, seemingly in wonder at her calmness, in such contrast to all the others, then slipped his hand in hers, and the two went forward together.

"Do you know where we are?" she bent down to ask when they had reached the platform. "Have you any idea how far it is from here to Queen Junction?"

But the boy only shook his head, and pressed closer to her side as the car shot around a curve.

The speed they had attained now was something terrific. Marie had to grip hard on the silver-mounted rail behind her to keep from being thrown off. But she would not go back inside. Hers was a nature that must know the worst of things, so she stood there, holding the little boy by the hand, peering out into the darkness ahead, straining her eyes for the sight of some light that would probably mean death to her and all the others aboard.

Once or twice she thought of the craven coward at the other end.

"How will he ever dare look me in the face again?" she asked herself. Then as she realized that he might never have the opportunity, she tried to

turn her mind from such reflections on others, and, closing her eyes for an instant, her lips moved silently.

Meanwhile the car rushed on, all its splendid fitting and the wealth of those it bore, powerless to check its course.

The crickets chirped in the woods on either hand, a gentle breeze softly stirred the leaves, and the stars looked down calmly. It did not seem possible that death in such frightful form, or a maiming that might be worse than death, could be so near. Marie felt that she must be dreaming it all, when a whistle sounded sharply ahead, and she awoke again to the awful reality.

CHAPTER V.

THE RUSTED SWITCH.

Breck enjoyed that walk to the Tipton post-office hugely, a solitary one though it was. The air in that high altitude was so fresh and bracing that the mere act of breathing was a delight. He soon found that of which he was in search, mailed the letters, and then started on a leisurely stroll back to the Starling.

"I wonder what mother and Helen are doing now?" he mused as he walked along. "I trust not worrying about me. I hope mother doesn't think it suspicious that I make no mention of Deane in my letters. I'd like to know just how much faith Marie puts in him. Well, I suppose I ought to be an awfully contented fellow over my 'luck'," and Breck contradicted the sentiment by heaving a deep sigh.

When he reached the station he felt tempted to prolong his stroll.

"But no," he reminded himself, "the gentlemen are away, and I don't believe Syd has got back yet, so I'd better get aboard."

Thus reflecting, he rounded the corner of the building and made an astonishing discovery. The Starling had disappeared.

He rubbed his eyes and hurried forward to make sure that he had looked in the right spot. But there could be no mistake. There was the identical switch on which the car had stood less than twenty minutes before, now deserted and giving no sign.

"They can't have gone on without a locomotive," soliloquized Breck, "and I am sure if there had been one around I should have heard it."

But to satisfy himself he lighted one of the wax matches he always carried and then took a time table out of his pocket.

"The only train that comes anywhere near here at this hour is the Eastern Express, and that turns off at Queen Junction, at least five miles below," he assured himself after an examination of the card.

Below! The word started a train of thought that sent a trembling through him. The grade! Tipton was just on the summit. Was it not possible that in some way the brakes may have become loosened and the Starling be now speeding down the steep incline to meet—the Eastern Express!

At the instant the thought suggested itself, a faint cry, in a woman's voice, came wafted on the night air from the direction in which Breck stood gazing.

"I must be right," he murmured, feeling for the moment a sense of such utter helplessness as nearly took all the strength out of his body.

What could he do? To telegraph ahead would not be of much avail, even supposing that he could find the operator and have the office opened in time. Another locomotive, a hand-car, a horse, one and all of these possible expedients flashed into his mind only to be at once rejected as utterly impracticable.

Never in his life had Breck felt so utterly helpless, not even when he had himself been placed in positions of extreme peril, as once when the horse he was driving had run away, and on another occasion when he had been one of a party in a capsized sail boat. Then he had been face to face with the danger, had been able to grapple with it, so to speak. Now it seemed that, while he knew the terrible nature of the catastrophe so close at hand, he must stand there powerless to avert or modify it.

But could he not modify—nay, perchance avert it, after all? The reflections above set down flashed through the boy's brain in a second of time, and even as the new thought came to him he had set off at a

run—not down the track, but straight down the hill side, into the woods at his right.

The horseshoe curve the road made at this point—the switch—the disused branch! These things had recurred to Breck's mind like a reprieve to a condemned criminal. If it were possible for him to cut across and reach the spot to which he had called the brakeman's attention in the afternoon, he might open the switch and send the runaway car out of the way of the Express. Of course there might be unknown dangers on this branch, but surely none as certain nor as terrible as the one that now threatened.

But how slim the chance that he would be able to accomplish his purpose! In the first place would it be possible for him to reach the desired point in time? Then, was it not probable that the switch was either locked or so rusted from disuse that he would not be able to move it?

But now was not the time for doubt or uncertainty. This could but hamper him in his attempts to reach the goal, so on he dashed, tripping more than once over outcropping rock or the exposed roots of a tree, and scratching face and hands against the bushes he had no time to dodge, but went plunging through as if forced by some powerful magnet to keep to one particular course.

It seemed as if he would never reach the track

again, and a dozen times he was sure he had missed the way and was hurrying in exactly the opposite direction. So when he came suddenly out upon it, the two rails gleaming cold in the starlight, he was surprised. But there was no opportunity now for anything save action. A dull rumbling, growing more distinct each second, announced that the runaway car was close upon him.

He made a dash at the switch lever. Thank Heaven it was not locked, but it resisted his first efforts to pull it toward him.

But what was that? A sound of puffing lower down the grade. The Eastern Express was close at hand. Unless he could throw open that switch a terrible catastrophe must ensue.

His brain reeling at the frightful picture prophetic fancy conjured up, Breck strained every muscle. He must, he would move that iron bar.

Ah, now it answers to the pressure brought to bear. One tug more and Breck has just time to fall back out of the suction formed by the flying car when the Starling dashes past him like a flash. One glimpse he obtains of a white-robed figure on the front platform, and then the brilliantly lighted, gorgeously fitted coach dashes out upon the branch and is swallowed up in the denseness of the woods.

Fortunately this branch does not leave the main

line at right angles, or in taking the curve the runaway would have almost certainly jumped the rails. But what pitfalls might not lurk in its path even now? A fallen tree, a rotten tie, a cave in of an embankment, any of these would be sufficient to cause disaster, and on a stretch of track that had received no care for a year it was all too probable that such traps might exist.

"I must follow it up at once," Breck told himself, but first, to insure safety to any other trains that might pass over the main line, he restored the switch to its former position.

"One accident a night is enough," he reflected.

This done, he set out over the ties in the direction of Power's Folly.

"I wonder if Syd was aboard?" he asked himself, as he hastened onward. "But no, he couldn't have been, or he surely could have set the brakes and stopped the flight. Besides, there was a woman on the front platform. Or no, I'm sure it was a girl—Marie! The ladies must have been all alone, with not even Tom or the cook aboard to give them help. What a fearful experience, and poor Mrs. Bell such an invalid! I shouldn't wonder if this would put a stop to the tour."

Little did Breck imagine in just what way the tour would be brought to an end.

On and on, sometimes running, but oftener compelled to confine himself to a walk by the gullies that the rains had scooped out between the ties.

"I guess the Starling must have run clear through to the Folly," surmised Breck. "The grade seems pretty level here, so it must come to a stop some time."

He was beginning to grow calmer now, and a warm glow diffused itself through his nerves as he realized that after all he might have been instrumental in saving the Starling and the lives of all on board. Then the question arose in his mind of what he would do when he came up with the car.

"Perhaps I ought to have gone to Tipton, or kept on down to Queen Junction," he reflected, "to tell them of what had occurred and have an engine sent out to the rescue."

But now that he had come this far it was not worth while going back; besides, he was not yet positive that everything was all right. There might be an accident ahead any minute, in which case his services were sure to be needed. There would be time enough afterwards to set Mr. Bell's mind at rest.

So Breck kept on.

"I believe it's going to storm," he told himself presently, as a gust of wind blew a cloud of dust in his face.

He looked up and saw that the stars were already obscured, and soon great drops of rain began to fall.

Almost at the same instant Breck caught sight of lights ahead, and the next second he passed out of the woods and found himself on the verge of a deep ravine, at the bottom of which he could hear water rushing over the stones.

It was now intensely dark, but after standing still for a while, Breck made out that the lights he saw ahead must come from the Starling, which had crossed a bridge and was now at a standstill on the other side of the ravine.

"It can't be half a mile away, so here goes to cross the bridge too. It's solid planking underneath the ties, so there's not much danger of my falling through."

So Breck started on again, carefully feeling his way, and every now and then raising his eyes to look at the lights ahead.

CHAPTER VI.

A SEARCH AND ITS RESULT.

We must now ask the reader to transfer his attention back to Tipton, on the return to the station there of Mr. Bell and Dr. Brisbane. This occurred not five minutes after our friend Breck had gone plunging off through the woods in his attempt to save the runaway car.

To say that both gentlemen were utterly astounded at finding the switch vacant would be but feebly to reproduce with the types their state of mind.

"Great Heavens, doctor, what can this mean?" ejaculated Mr. Bell, who, although not as a rule a nervous man, was easily disturbed by any calamity, either real or fancied, that might affect his wife's welfare. "We have come out in the right spot, have we not? Surely stations are not so plentiful on these far Western roads that we have struck on another place than Tipton."

"No, for there is the name on the front of the station plain enough. You are sure there was no misunderstanding of orders, and that no passing train has picked up our car in our absence and run off with it?"

The doctor spoke half jocosely, but his eye strayed rather suggestively towards the switch, which was located just below the top of the grade.

At this moment Syd came up, and the now half distracted shipping merchant eagerly grasped him by the sleeve.

"What does this mean?" he cried. "What has become of my car?"

There was surely no counterfeiting of amazement in the glance that the brakeman cast towards the spot where the sumptuously fitted Starling had stood when he started on his errand up into the village not twenty minutes previous. Before he could make any verbal reply, a woman came hurrying from the other side of the station and rushed up to the group.

"Oh, sirs," she exclaimed, "did you see anything of a little boy about here? I've lost my Willie. He slipped out of the house while I was down cellar, and now I can't find him anywhere. I've been to all the neighbors, but they haven't seen him. Only Rob Pickens says he was telling him about that pri-

vate car that came in to-night, and thought he might have come down here to see it. But I see that's gone and——"

"No, we haven't seen your little boy," Mr. Bell broke in almost impatiently. He was so full of anxious perplexity over his own troubles that just then he had no room in his mind for the tribulations of others. Besides at that moment he caught sight of Tom and the cook returning from their foraging expedition, their arms full of bundles and such an expression of bewilderment on their faces at discovering the absence of the Starling as would have been ludicrous under other circumstances.

Hasty queries put to both resulted no more satisfactorily than had the same when addressed to Syd, and Mr. Bell was about to resume his questioning of the brakeman, when he suddenly beheld the latter bound away from the platform and dash up the street as though on the way to give an alarm of fire. At the same instant the woman who had been inquiring for her little boy sank down on the bench in front of the ticket office window, threw her apron over her head and burst into a low, wailing cry.

"Bless me! what's the matter?" exclaimed Mr. Bell, hurrying up to the spot. "And where's that Syd gone?"

"Oh, sir," moaned Willie's mother, "he—he thinks

my boy was fooling—with—with the brakes and that the car has run off with him on it."

"Merciful heavens!" groaned poor Mr. Bell, recoiling a step or two, and with his face turning as white as his collar.

The doctor stepped hastily forward.

"Don't be disturbed, Mr. Bell," he said. "Even in case what she says is true, without doubt they have succeeded in stopping the car before it got very far. The brakes were all in good order, you know."

"But Syd was not there to man them, nor Tom, nor the cook. And the shock of the incident of itself is enough to kill Gertrude in her present state of health. Can nothing be done? Let us telegraph all along the line, get an engine to go—oh, Brisbane, help me, suggest something, or I shall go mad!"

The doctor's position was truly anything but enviable, with the moaning woman on one side of him and his half distracted friend on the other.

"Syd has gone to set measures on foot already," he replied, laying his hand on the merchant's arm. "He will bring the station agent back with him and have dispatches wired down the line and a hand car sent out from here in case the Starling has been stopped, which I fully believe to be the case, within a mile or two of Tipton. You must remember that

your nephew was doubtless on board, as he did not rejoin us, and also young Eastman."

"But I sent Eastman to the post-office, and Deane is a mere boy. Besides, have I not told you that the startling nature of the episode is what I fear as much almost as any possible outcome of it? You must come with me on the hand car, Brisbane. Heaven grant that Gertrude be not beyond the reach of your skill when we find them."

By this time the news of the affair had spread and quite a crowd had gathered about the little group on the station platform.

"Willie Pelton was fooling with the brake and sent the swell car off down the grade," passed from mouth to mouth, and each newcomer, as he heard the tidings, pressed forward to try and obtain a glimpse of the man that was pointed out as the owner of the car, and whose wife and guests were on board.

But soon the moon was hidden by heavy clouds, and by the time Syd came back with the station agent great drops of rain began to fall. However, now that the door of the waiting-room was opened, all crowded inside and an involuntary hush fell on the assemblage when the telegraph instrument began ticking out its query to Queen Junction:

"Have you seen anything of a runaway car?"

Mr. Bell was given a chair close by the operator's

table, and the expression on his face as he waited for the answering dispatch was something that Doctor Brisbane never forgot. On a seat in the waiting-room Mrs. Pelton was moaning on her husband's shoulder, and outside the rain was now falling in torrents.

It was ten minutes before the expected answer was received, and then it contained only the one word: "No."

But that was enough to chase a little of the gloom from Mr. Bell's countenance.

"Come, Brisbane," he exclaimed, springing to his feet. "Where is that hand car? We ought to set out at once."

"But will you go yourself in all this storm?" the doctor ventured to remonstrate. "Had you not better wait in the hotel? It——"

"Brisbane," interrupted the merchant, "I *must* go, whether you come with me or not."

There was nothing more to be said, so the hand car was got out, and with Syd and Tom to work it, and Mr. Bell and the doctor as passengers, the searching party set out down the grade.

They were all wet to the skin in an instant, for the umbrellas and cloaks that had been loaned them were but a poor protection against such a downpour as that which had suddenly burst over the mountain.

The wind, too, blew with terrific force, and only by crouching down and clutching the "pump handles" did the party succeed in keeping themselves on the car.

As there was no need of propelling force to send them down the grade, Syd confined his attention to the brake and to peering ahead as well as he could in the gloom in search of that which all were afraid they might find—the wreck of the Starling.

But no signs of this or of the car itself were discovered, and by the time the storm had spent itself the hand car ran into the glow of light sent out by the station at Queen Junction.

"Well, that is mysterious," exclaimed the ticket agent there when he had heard their report. "I'm positive she didn't pass here. But I'll order an engine out so's you can go on down the line and make sure. It beats me."

"Perhaps—but no, that couldn't be," and the frown of perplexity deepened again on Syd's brow.

"What was that? Let me hear it," demanded Mr. Bell, who already looked five years older than he did when he started out on that stroll with the doctor.

"Why, I was thinking that the car might have got off on that old branch road that ran up to Power's Folly, but that couldn't possibly happen."

"Why not?" and the shipping merchant leaned forward eagerly.

Syd smiled faintly as he answered: "Because, if by any possible chance they had run off there, we must have followed them, don't you see, on account of the switch."

"To be sure," and then Mr. Bell asked how soon the special engine would be ready.

It steamed up to the platform some twenty minutes later, with a car attached, and then a fresh start was made in search of the missing car. But although they kept on to Factonburgh, which was on an up grade and beyond which the escaped car could not have run, no faintest trace of it was discovered.

The party remained in Factonburgh over night, and retraced their course the next day, thinking that perhaps the Starling might have been thrown clear off the track by some means, and that they had passed its wreck in the darkness. But nothing was discovered, and the mystery was deepening.

It was high noon when they reached Queen Junction again, and Mr. Bell thought it rather strange that the station agent did not come out to meet them. He knew why a little later when he chanced to overhear a conversation between two railroad men who did not know who he was.

'Yes, Bill," said one. "They didn't find the car

anywhere down the road, and it's about certain now she took that plunge off into the river. You know the curve's mighty sharp at that point, and the track runs close to the bank, so comin' down the hill at the rate she must have been going, she jumped the rail and went clean over."

"And there's no chance of findin' any trace of them in that torrent I s'pose?" said the other.

"I should say not," rejoined the first speaker. "Everything'd be swept away like a deck o' cards. It must a' happened just when the storm broke last night when nobody was about to see. Terrible, ain't it? Everybody on board lost, of course, mostly ladies, I'm told. The river's almighty deep, so I s'pose nothing'll come to the surface anywhere along the course for three or four days. Hello, what's that?"

Mr. Bell had fallen prostrate, utterly overcome by the terrible news, which, after a week spent in further investigations, he was fain to accept as the true solution of the mystery, for not a trace of the missing Starling could be discovered.

Utterly broken down, he returned East with the doctor, and three families were plunged into the deepest grief, for as Breck did not report, Mr. Bell was forced to conclude that he had returned from the post-office in time to take that fatal ride down the grade.

CHAPTER VII.

POWER'S FOLLY.

BRECK's crossing of that railroad bridge over the ravine sometimes comes up before him now in the form of a terrible dream. For not until he reached the center of it did he become aware of the fact that it was hanging to either bank by a thread, as it were, and threatened at any moment, under the force of the terrible gale that was blowing, to topple into the abyss below, a mass of ruins.

But it was too late now to retreat. Besides, should he turn around, he would no longer have the lights in the Starling for a beacon.

"How did that car get across, though," Breck asked himself, "if the bridge was in this shaky condition? I should think——"

But at this point in his reflections he recollected hearing of cases where structures would sustain the

weight of a heavy burden, passing over them quickly, and then give way beneath a much lighter one.

It had ceased raining, but the wind was still whistling through the tree tops with ominous reminders of its power. Breck could actually feel the bridge sway and tremble beneath him.

At the risk of taking a misstep he redoubled his speed.

"When I get to them in the car," he told himself, "I must warn them that we will have to get back by some roundabout way. As for the poor old Starling, I don't see any chance of ever getting her off, unless we lay a track out in the opposite direction."

Flash, boom, crash! A vivid flare of lightning, a deafening thunder-clap, and immediately thereafter the sound of falling timbers just behind him, told Breck that the bridge must have been struck. For one brief moment of agony he gave himself up for lost. The next he stumbled, and, as he went down headlong, he was sensible that the toe of one shoe dug into the earth.

That satisfied him. He had reached the opposite bank, and was safe.

Three minutes later he had regained his feet, and was hurrying along beside the track in the direction of the Starling's lights, which were now close at hand.

He noticed that the grade ascended slightly here.

"I suppose that checked the speed of the car sufficiently to enable them to apply the brakes," he said to himself. "I wonder if this is Power's Folly?"

But he was now close beside the car, and as he ascended the steps of the rear platform his thoughts were wholly centered on those he would find within, and their probable state of mind.

As he closed the door behind him, some one inside screamed, and he recognized the voice of Estelle, Mrs. Bell's maid. Then he heard Marie's calm tones commanding her to be quiet, and the next instant this brave girl herself met him in the passag way.

"Oh, Mr. Eastman!" she cried out joyously, and impulsively rushed forward to clasp Breck's hand.

"You are safe, all of you?" he asked, glancing toward the door of the parlor just ahead.

"Yes. Aunt Gertrude fainted, but is now better. But tell me, how did you get here? Where are we, and are Uncle Archibald and Dr. Brisbane with you? But how pale you are, and your clothes are all mud; and see, there is a great cut on your hand! Don't let me keep you standing here. I know you must have gone through a good deal to get to us. Come into the dining-room and sit down."

"Oh, I'll be all right in a minute or two." Breck, with a sigh of relief, sank into one of the leather

covered chairs around the table as he spoke, and was about to answer some of Marie's questions when Deane, his right hand bound up in a handkerchief, burst into the room.

"Why, is it you, Eastman?" he exclaimed. "Have you been on the car all the time?"

"No, he hasn't," broke in Marie, rather sharply, and with a suggestiveness in her tones that Deane only too well understood. "Can't you see he's nearly used up from chasing the car?"

"And are uncle, and Syd, and a lot of men coming with an engine to take us back to Tipton?" Deane inquired, eagerly.

"I don't know; I didn't see any of them when I started."

"And do you mean to say," broke in Marie, "that you have run after us all this way? How did you know we turned off from the main line?" She gave a little shiver as she added this, and lowered her voice as she went on: "You know that was all that saved us from colliding with the Eastern Express."

"Well, I ought to have known," Breck replied, with a smile, "seeing that I was the one who turned the switch for you."

"You did?" exclaimed Marie and Deane in a breath, although with slightly different accents.

Then, "Oh, mother," added the former, turning

to Mrs. Granville, who had just appeared in the doorway, "only think, it was Mr. Eastman who saved us all! We didn't tell you at the time, but when we ran down that steep grade from Tipton we found out that there was an Express coming the other way on the same track. And Mr. Eastman thought of letting us run off on a switch just before we met it, and here he is now."

"But I don't understand," rejoined Mrs. Granville, looking at Breck through her glasses in a dazed sort of way, "I thought we left Mr. Eastman in Tipton. How could he have got ahead of us in time to turn a switch?"

"That's so. I don't understand it either," hastily put in Deane, who had looked very uncomfortable during Marie's enthusiastic outburst over the young stenographer.

A perplexed, troubled look shot across Marie's face for an instant. Breck saw it, and, "Does she, too, doubt my word?" he asked himself.

"I know it seems queer," he said, rising from his chair, in deference to Mrs. Granville, who remained standing, "and I couldn't have done it if the road wasn't built in a horse-shoe curve between here and Tipton."

He then proceeded to explain about his conversation with Syd on the rear platform during the after-

noon, and how the recollection of the branch line to Power's Folly came up in his mind when he returned to the station and found that the car had disappeared.

"You are a brave young man," spoke up Mrs. Granville heartily, when he had finished, and advancing, she extended her hand.

Then she, too, noticed his pallor, and the marks of earth on his clothes, and five minutes later found Breck on a divan in the parlor, a bandage redolent of Pond's Extract around one hand, and a glass of cordial, which he had been commanded to drink, standing on the card table by his side. Marie and her mother had gone to Mrs. Bell's room for a few minutes in response to a summons through Estelle, and for the time being the only member of the party left in the saloon was Deane.

"I cut my hand, too," said the latter, holding up his bandaged wrist for Breck's inspection. "When the car first started off I hurried to the platform so fast to put on the brake that I shoved my arm through the glass in the door. My right one, too, you see, so I was no good. If it hadn't been for that I could have stopped it in short order."

"Hello, who's that?" asked Breck, suddenly, inclining his head toward the small boy who was asleep on a divan on the other side of the saloon.

"Why, that's the little beggar who caused all the

mischief," rejoined Deane. "Some Tipton youngster, who got to fooling with the brake, and then was so frightened that he didn't know enough to jump off."

"But I don't understand why you didn't find out that the car was moving in time to jump off yourselves, or else when it was going so slowly that Estelle could brake it, if you were useless for that kind of work."

"Well, you see we were all playing whist, and got terribly interested in it. Then I suppose that we have been accustomed to the motion of the car for so long now that we didn't take in what it meant till suddenly Marie jumped up and wanted to know why we were moving. By that time, though, we were bowling along at a terrible gait, and the girls couldn't do a thing with the brakes. I tried to help them all I could, of course, but it was no go, or rather," Deane added with a smile, "it was all go."

"And what stopped you finally?" inquired Breck.

"Well, we got going slower and slower, and Marie, who was afraid we'd come to the end of the track all the time, and tumble down some embankment stood over the brake herself, and just as soon as she could make an impression on the wheels, stopped her. And it is a mighty lucky thing she did, too, for as soon as we came to a standstill I got Syd's lantern and went out to explore, and found that

the track only ran a few hundred yards further, and then ended just near the edge of a precipice. You know we're on a sort of inland island, as near as I could make out in the dark. The only connection with the main land seems to be over the railroad bridge. It's a queer place."

"An island!" exclaimed Breck, suddenly sitting up straight. "Then we're prisoners, for the bridge is down!"

CHAPTER VIII.

A MOMENTOUS QUESTION.

"THE bridge down!" Deane dropped into a chair as he repeated the words, and Marie, entering the room at that moment, beheld the two boys gazing at one another each with a set expression of countenance that made her suspect at first they had been quarreling. Deane's first words, however, disabused her of this idea.

"But how can it be gone," he exclaimed, "when you came over on it? I don't understand."

"It was struck by lightning, I think," answered Breck. "I know it was pretty shaky when I came over, and the wind was blowing great guns. Then, just as I got across I heard a crash of timbers behind me."

"Why, what is it, what has happened, Deane, Mr. Eastman?" asked Marie, looking from one to the other in troubled suspense.

"He says the bridge has gone, and if so, we'll have to stay here," answered Deane, bluntly.

"But are you sure the place is an island, as you call it?" put in Breck, hastily, with a wish to reassure Marie. "I don't see how it can possibly be."

"Well, you will quick enough in the morning," retorted Deane. "I tell you I went all along the edge of the precipice, chasm, or whatever you've a mind to call it, till I came to the place I started from. And if that don't make this place out an island, I'd like to know what will! The only hope I can see for us is that Uncle Archibald and a party will come after us, and fling ropes or something of the sort over for us to scramble across on. Wish I'd watched the tight rope walker a little closer the last time I went to the circus."

"Hush, Deane," cautioned Marie. "Don't let Aunt Gertrude suspect anything of this."

"She can see it for herself plain enough, I'll wager, when she looks out of the window to-morrow morning."

"But doesn't anybody live near here?" inquired Marie, looking at Breck.

He shook his head.

"Syd told me it was an abandoned summer resort," he answered; then turning to Deane he added: "Did you see anything of a hotel?"

"Didn't see a vestige of anything but the great chasm."

"How long did it take you to make the circuit?"

"Well, I don't just remember. How long was I gone, Marie?"

"Over half an hour, I'm sure."

"You can judge by that, then. It's small enough to make the idea of remaining here any length of time an extremely unpleasant one. Mostly rock, too, apparently."

"But surely," observed Marie, "we shan't have to stay here very long. As Deane says, Mr. Bell is certain to come to our relief when he finds the car gone, and then they can build another bridge, if necessary. But how will he know we are here?" she added, as a new thought struck her. "This is a branch line, hardly ever used, so perhaps——"

"Why, of course," explained Deane, "as soon as they send an engine out from Tipton in search of us it can't help but run out on this branch and then they'll know that we must have come this way too."

Breck caught his breath suddenly. What if his changing the switch back, as he had done, should result in Mr. Bell's not finding them? No one knew that he had gone to intercept the runaway car. Finding the switch set just as it always was, would any one suspect for a moment that the Starling had

run off in this direction? Should he tell what he had done? He had not long to debate the question with himself.

"Is that so, Mr. Eastman?" said Marie, turning from Deane to him. "Do you think that is the way it will be?"

"No, because I turned the switch back again after the Startling had gone by."

"Turned the switch back?" cried Deane, turning on him almost fiercely. "Why, you idiot, what on earth made you do that?"

Breck ground the knuckles of each hand into his palms and kept muttering to himself: "I deserve it all. I deserve it all," so he was enabled to answer with comparative calmness: "I did it because the main line is only a single track road. I didn't know at what moment a wild cat engine or a freight might come along and take the switch. Then if the Starling came to a standstill a little beyond—you see I couldn't possibly tell how far she would run—there would be a disastrous collision."

"But how did you expect our party to know what had become of us?" demanded Deane.

"That is one of the reasons I followed you," answered Breck. "To find out where the car had stopped and then go back and tell the others. What I did, I did for the best. I couldn't foresee that there

would be a bridge in the path, and that it would fall just after I had gone over it. But I may be mistaken, and in the morning we may find that there is enough of it left for me to make my way over on and so get back to Tipton with the news."

"And even if you can't do that, Mr. Eastman," put in Marie, "don't let that matter of the switch trouble you. I'm sure you've done more for us now than any of us can ever repay. We ought all to be thankful that our lives have been spared, and not fall to bickering over the matter of a few hours' delay in our rescue. But come; it's not likely that uncle will be after us to-night. It's nearly eleven now, and I am sure we all need rest. I will say good-night now, and suggest that you two speedily repeat it to one another."

She extended her hand to Breck, and as the latter took it he felt that it was almost worth while to have Deane make a set at him for the pleasure of gaining such a splendid champion.

"Oh, I forgot," she exclaimed, halting beside the sleeping boy on her way out. "Here is this child, poor little chap, I dare say his mother is nearly frantic about him. It doesn't seem just right to let him lie here all night."

"I'll carry him into my quarters. There's plenty of room there," volunteered Breck.

"Oh, yes, I wish you would. Good-night again."

"I hope you see what a confounded scrape you've got us into, Eastman," muttered Deane, as soon as the peacemaker had vanished. "There's no knowing how long we may have to stay here now, all owing to your stupidity."

It was on the tip of Breck's tongue to retort, "How about *your* stupidity in hurting your hand just when you most wanted the use of it?" but reflecting that an argument was probably the thing Deane desired most, he disappointed him by saying nothing but "Good-night," as he picked up the sleeping boy and bore him off to his own room, where he placed him on the inside of the broad bed.

"I wonder if Deane is right and I *am* an idiot for resetting that switch?" Breck asked himself, as he began to undress. "But who in the world would imagine that the Starling was going to end up its runaway spree on an inland island? But I'm not going to worry about it any more to-night. We can surely find some way of getting back to Tipton to-morrow. There may not be water on all sides of us. It was too dark for Deane to tell whether there was or not. Funny how he came to cut his hand opening the door. Don't see what he wanted to put his hand away up there when the knob is below. Wonder if he

did it on purpose? Great jingo, I *mustn't* forget to see about that!"

Slipping on his coat again, Breck went out on the back platform and descended to the ground. It had cleared off, and the stars looked down as serenely as they had done when the Starling started on its eventful trip down the grade. The only sound that broke the stillness was the rush of the mountain torrent in the direction where Breck had had his narrow escape on the bridge.

Picking his way over the rocky ground, Breck searched about for a few moments, and then selected a stone about the size of his head. This he bore back to the car and placed on the track, chock against one of the rear wheels.

"There, Mistress Starling," he murmured, "I guess you won't take it into your head to run away with us again before morning."

He dusted his hands softly against one another and then, when he had remounted the platform, stood for a moment peering out into the night.

"I wonder if a watch ought to be kept?" he asked himself.

Then he smiled at the absurdity of the notion.

"If we can't get off, I guess there's no danger of anybody else coming on to molest us," he reflected; and, re-entering the car, he was soon in bed.

But it was long before he succeeded in getting to sleep. The nature of their position was so entirely unique that he could not cease thinking about it.

"It's a sort of Robinson Crusoe business," he kept reflecting; "only instead of being driven to a desert island in a ship, our party's had the same experience in a Pullman car. I can't get used to the idea."

CHAPTER IX.

A STRANGE IMPRISONMENT.

WHEN Breck opened his eyes the next morning it was to find the small boy next him sitting up in bed, looking at him with an intensity of gaze that the other felt must have had its influence in disturbing his slumbers.

"Where is this? How did I get here?" the little fellow asked, when he saw his companion's eyes open.

"Well, young man," rejoined Breck, "you had a free ride here on the private car Starling, and I believe they call this place Power's Folly. Did you ever hear of it before?"

The boy shook his head.

"Can't I go home?" he inquired next, preparing to scramble over Breck to the floor. "I want my breakfast."

"Great Scott, so do I! I wonder whose going to get it."

This thought reminded the older youth that he ought to be up and take a survey of the land. Looking at his watch he discovered that it was just eight, and yet he heard no one stirring in the car.

Giving the boy an illustrated paper to look at, he dressed himself hurriedly and went outside.

It was a superb day. There was scarcely a cloud in the sky, and on all sides a chorus of bird music rose in gladsomeness after the storm. Eagerly Breck cast his eyes along the track toward the edge of the ravine, and there, sure enough, it ended abruptly, a few feet beyond the rock.

The chasm was all of two hundred feet wide, and at the bottom flowed a raging torrent, dashii g over bowlders and down a series of falls with a force that forbade all thought of swimming or fording it.

"I must see what the outlook is in the other direction," said Breck to himself, as he sprang off the step and made his way along by the side of the car.

As he came out beyond its further end, he uttered an exclamation of surprise, for there, some fifty yards away, stood a three-story building, evidently intended for a hotel, for still faintly legible across its weather-beaten front were the words, "Inland Island House."

"Then Deane must be right," was the first reflection that struck him. "We are quite cut off from

the main, now that the bridge is gone. Can it be possible that it is the same stream on both sides of us?"

Leaving the dismantled hotel to be investigated later on, he hurried to the edge of the plateau on which it was built, and, looking over, recoiled for an instant, with a dizzy sensation in his head. For, though there was no water below, the descent was so sheer and far reaching that it seemed like looking into a bottomless pit.

Away down at the foot was a mass of jagged rocks lifting their rough edges up as though in warning to any who might have the temerity to seek to scale the sides that inclosed them.

"Certainly there is no escape here," murmured Breck. "I wonder if it is the same further on," and, an ever-increasing anxiety in his heart, he hurried on along the edge of the precipice.

But there was no improvement in the prospect. Indeed it grew more discouraging if anything, for in places the rocky surface on which Breck walked actually overhung the chasm, while the distance across to the opposite side varied all the way from two hundred to four hundred feet.

Presently Breck came to the point where the ravine on his right joined the turbulent stream on his left, and, facing the opposite way, he was enabled to gain

some sort of an idea of the topography of the place of their imprisonment.

It was about half a mile long and about a quarter of a mile in width at the upper end where the hotel and railroad track were, while it narrowed down almost to a point at the spot where Breck stood.

It seemed to him as if at some time a mighty flood had cut away the sandstone, or whatever it may have been, from either side of it, and left the plateau an inland island indeed, and almost a desert one at that, for there seemed to be not a dozen trees on it, and scarcely any grass, most of the surface being hard, flinty rock.

Breck's face was grave as he retraced his steps toward the Starling.

"I don't see how we are going to get away from here without help from outside," he said to himself. "Everything seems to be against us. If the storm had only happened an hour earlier the bridge would——"

He stopped short. Had the storm destroyed the bridge before the runaway car reached it, would not the latter have plunged into the abyss, probably killing all on board? No, it was a thousand times better as it was.

But would Mr. Bell ever think of looking for them here? To be sure the switch would not indicate that the Starling had come this way, but then, when they

could not find the car anywhere else, surely they would follow up this branch line, and then of course there would soon be a way of rescue discovered.

Resolving to take this cheerful view of the case, Breck regained the car, deciding that the next thing on the programme was breakfast.

At the doorway of his own room he met Deane.

"I was looking for you to see if you could tell us anything about making coffee," said the latter. "Estelle doesn't seem to know how to do anything except dress hair and shriek. Neither Aunt Gertrude nor Mrs. Granville ever cooked a meal in their lives, and Marie's in the kitchen now, trying to see what she can do towards patching up some sort of a breakfast."

"Yes, I've made coffee when a lot of us fellows have been camping out. I wonder if there are any eggs aboard?"

The two went forward to find Marie tricked out in the cook's white cap and apron, peering into the coffee-pot with a puzzled line of doubt running down her forehead.

"I'm sure there must something else go in," she said, "but I can't think what it is."

Breck said "Good-morning," suggested eggs, and started toward the pantry to hunt for some when he suddenly halted with the exclamation: "Why, there isn't any fire in the stove!"

"Oh, I forgot about that!" and Marie leaned back against the cold stove, weak from laughter, while Deane's brow grew glum as he wanted to know if he was expected to make it.

"Of course you are," declared Marie, as soon as she could speak. "You know you'd think there was no better fun if you were off on a picnic."

"I'll help you," volunteered Breck, who returned at that moment with one egg, which was all he could find.

"I wonder if it's a good one," said the fair young cook as she took it and looked it over critically. "Do you know how to tell?" she added, glancing up at Breck.

"Perhaps I could guess at it if you broke it open," he replied with a smile, and at that moment Estelle appeared with a cup in her hand.

"Mrs. Bell would like her hot water," she said.

"Oh, dear, we will have to fly around," exclaimed Marie. "Aunt Gertrude isn't used to having to wait for what she wants."

But in spite of all the "flying around" that was done, it was after ten o'clock before that "home made" breakfast was ready. And then all it consisted of was coffee, fried potatoes, sardines and crackers.

The only thing in the shape of meat the young people were able to find was a hunk of dried beef,

and as none of them were sure how it ought to be cooked, they decided not to try any experiments, but to get along for this time on a box of sardines. Evidently the supply in the larder had run very low and Tipton was to have furnished a stock to replenish it.

There had been so much excitement connected with the getting up of this meal, meager as it was, that but little had been said about their situation, but when all were seated at table, Mrs. Bell wanted to know who was going back to let her husband know where they were.

"And I trust," she added, looking at Breck, "that you have not omitted to place signals on each side to warn trains that we are here."

The others exchanged glances of dismay. Evidently the invalid of the party did not yet know of the peculiar nature of the spot where the Starling had come to a halt.

"Oh, there is no danger from that source," responded Breck, when he found that the others waited for him to speak.

"But where are we?" went on Mrs. Bell. "It is very strange that no one has come to our assistance yet. Don't you think that as soon as breakfast is over you had better go back to Tipton and give news of our whereabouts?"

Once again Mrs. Bell's gaze rested on Breck and "Shall I tell her the true statement of the case?" he asked himself.

"I don't think he'd be a safe one to send, Aunt Gertrude," Deane put in before the other had a chance to reply. "He doesn't seem to make a success of putting uncle on our track."

Marie turned on him with a stare of angry amazement, and Mrs. Bell exclaimed in perplexity: "Why, what do you mean, Deane? I don't understand you."

"Well," returned Deane setting down his coffee cup and rising from his chair, preparatory to leaving the room, "he's fixed it so now that there's only one chance in a hundred that uncle ever finds out where we are, and *none of us can get away to tell him!*"

CHAPTER X.

WAITING.

MRS. BELL'S face, pale ordinarily, took on a deathly hue as Deane roughly broke the news of their situation to her, in the manner described at the close of the preceding chapter.

"Oh, Deane, how could you?" exclaimed Marie, but he had already left the room.

"What does he mean? Where are we?" demanded Mrs. Bell, waving aside the smelling salts which Mrs. Granville was pressing upon her, and looking in wild, startled fashion first at Marie, then at Breck.

"Deane's exaggerating things, aunt," returned the former. "Uncle may be here any minute. Mr. Eastman will go and see if he is not coming now."

Breck understood that it would be best for him to be absent while explanations were made, and withdrew at once, leaving his fair champion a hard task. For Mrs. Bell had first to be informed of the danger they had run, during last night's wild ride,

of colliding with the Eastern Express, of how this had been averted by Breck's forethought in turning the disused switch, and then made to comprehend his excess of caution in restoring the latter to its original position, after which the destruction of the bridge by the storm and the car's consequent imprisonment upon the island, had to be made clear.

Poor Mrs. Bell's nerves were quite used up in trying to comprehend this rather involved series of events, and Marie feared, when she had finished her task, that she had not made much of a success of it in so far as vindicating Breck was concerned. For all her aunt"s comment was, as she desired the girl to assist her to the saloon; "I told Archibald that he should have dropped business entirely while we were away, and then a stenographer need not have been brought along."

Meanwhile Breck had gone back to his room, where he found the small boy, looking so terrified that he rightly judged Deane had given him a scolding on his way out.

"Guess he feels worse than I do," soliloquized Eastman, "so if I sit down and try to brace up a bit, perhaps it'll do me good too."

"Don't you want any breakfast, sonny?" he began.

But at first the boy would make no reply. Finally, however, by a little persistence, Breck managed to

make him understand that the whole carful were not *down* on him, and then having ascertained that his name was Willie Pelton, induced him to accompany him out on the rear platform and thence around to the kitchen on the other end, where he was made acquainted with Estelle, and invited to join her at breakfast.

This kindly deed accomplished, Breck started off back along the track to the spot where it had run out upon the bridge. Reaching the brink he shaded his eyes with his hand and peered eagerly across, but with only a feeble hope of seeing that which he sought—some sign of a party in search of the missing car.

But the growth of forest on the other bank was very dense, and he could see but a little way beyond the edge of the ravine. All was quiet; no movement save now and then the flitting of a bird through the tree tops, and no sound but the roar of the mountain torrent as it swirled and dashed over its rocky bed far below.

There was not a vestige left of the bridge, only the two projecting ends. All the timbers that had fallen into the stream had long since been swept away.

"I wonder," mused Breck, as he stood there thoughtfully gazing down at the rushing waters, "if

we could not in some way manage to build a bridge ourselves just strong enough to hold one person."

But even as the idea formed itself in his mind, he was forced to acknowledge its impracticability.

They had neither the material nor the force necessary for the undertaking.

In the midst of his reflections he was startled by a light touch on his arm. Turning quickly, he saw Mrs. Granville standing beside him.

"Oh, Mr. Eastman," she began, "I wanted to see you away from the others and ask if you really considered our situation serious. Deane is such a hard-hearted, impulsive boy, I trust you will—will overlook his foolish speeches. Believe me, we realize deeply the debt we owe to you, and while it may have been unfortunate that you should have been so thoughtful as to reset that switch, I can understand clearly that you did it for the best. But do you not think some one ought to have come to our assistance before this? It is nearly eleven, is it not?"

Breck looked at his watch and gave the time as 10:50. Then,

"I see no cause for special uneasiness as yet, Mrs. Granville," he said. "A car is not like a ship. It cannot disappear entirely, so it is reasonable to suppose that Mr. Bell will look for it. Naturally they will not think of this place till they have gone over a good

portion of the main line. Of course if I had had the faintest notion that there would be anything like this happen"—Breck made an expressive gesture in the direction of the ravine—"resetting the switch would have been the last thing I would have thought of. Or if I had only hurried back last night before crossing the bridge!"

"Never mind the might-have-beens!" interposed Mrs. Granville. "You are, as I said, not in the slightest degree blameworthy for what has occurred, and it is to you we look as our chief dependence during our enforced stay here. I can see for myself that there is no crossing to the main land from this side. Are you quite positive that there is no way of getting across on the other? Deane tells us that there is no stream there."

"True, but the cliff is even more precipitous than it is here. If you like, we will walk over now and you can see for yourself."

The remainder of the morning was spent by these two in taking surveys of possible points of passage across the chasm. Mrs. Granville was a woman of steady nerves and well balanced mind, and Breck was thankful indeed that she took the matter so philosophically. One hysterical member of the party was quite sufficient.

Their tour of inspection, however, was absolutely

without fruit, except in so far as it confirmed Breck in his opinion that there was no apparent means of escape from their strange imprisonment at their command.

"But of course Mr. Bell will arrive here in his search for us in the course of a day or two," was Mrs. Granville's hopeful utterance as she proposed an adjournment to the Startling to see about lunch.

The getting up of this meal was the means of bringing about the unwelcome discovery that there was not such an abundant supply of provisions at command as could have been desired.

"Do you suppose we ought to put ourselves on an allowance now?" Marie asked Breck in a low voice.

These two had been appointed caterers to the party, and one had just discovered that there was no more bread, while the other reported a painful state of "low tide" in the coal box.

"No, that can hardly be necessary," he replied. "There must be a large quantity of crackers and preserves to draw upon."

"But what are we going to cook with?" demanded Marie.

"Crackers and preserves don't have to be cooked," was the smiling reply. "And I'm sure there's no danger of our freezing."

It was indeed intensely warm on the island, exposed as it was to the full glare of the sun, so that during the afternoon all were glad to remain in the car. Thus the day passed away and no sign of a rescue party was seen.

Deane, who had spent the morning poking about the abandoned hotel, to which, however, he had not succeeded in forcing an entrance, reported that behind it was a sort of stairway in the rocks which led down to the very brink of the river. But as the water swirled close about the bank on both sides the discovery was of no material advantage to the party. Indeed, it was the means of bringing that which was very like despair to their hearts. It came about in this way.

The next morning Breck had gone to the spot to investigate is on his own account. He was standing on the bottom step looking wistfully up the river and wondering if it would be possible for a good swimmer to cross such a racing, raging flood, when a mass of débris coming down stream on its surface caught his eye.

The course of the current was such that the stuff was swept directly toward him, and just as it reached the spot, some portion of the tree branches of which it was composed caught on a projecting spur of rock and remained stationary for an instant. In that mo-

ment Breck noticed a newspaper resting amid the mass.

He had his cane with him and with an impulse more of curiosity than anything else he reached over and fished the paper out with the crook. Holding up the wet mass carefully so as not to tear it, he saw that it was the *Queen Junction Journal* of that very morning.

"I suppose some passenger has dropped it as the train was crossing the bridge," he reflected. "How queer it seems to hear from the outside world again!"

Suddenly he uttered an exclamation and nearly lost his footing on the rock. His eye had caught sight of a news item, with staring head lines, that caused everything to swim before him.

CHAPTER XI.

NEWS FROM THE OUTSIDE WORLD.

WHAT Breck saw in the *Queen Junction Journal* that sent such a thrill of dismay to h s heart, was this :

TERRIBLE CALAMITY.

A PRIVATE CAR RUSHES DOWN A GRADE AND PLUNGES INTO THE RIVER.

LOSS OF ALL ON BOARD—SEVEN PERSONS.

AWFUL ENDING OF A PLEASURE TRIP.

Underneath these startling headlines was a detailed description of the Starling, together with a graphic account of its run down the mountains from Tipton and the terrible leap it was supposed to have taken at the curve just beyond Queen Junction into the river, now so swollen and turbulent with melting snows from the mountains that it was easy to con-

ceive how the car and all that it contained could be swept away and leave not a trace behind.

The narrative then went on to describe Mr. Bell's heart-breaking grief and departure with Dr. Brisbane for the East, with the purpose of at once taking steamer, it was rumored, for Europe.

The three column article also included sketches of each of the occupants of the ill-fated car, and Breck experienced the strangest sensations of his life in reading the following about himself.

"BRECKENRIDGE EASTMAN.

"Mr. Bell's young stenographer, had been sent by that gentleman to the post-office in Tipton, when he and the doctor started out for their stroll. As nothing has been seen of him since, the conclusion is inevitable that he, too, shared the terrible fate of those known positively to be lost, by returning before the run down the grade began. It must ever remain a mystery why, with two young men on board, the car was not brought to a standstill before it reached the fatal curve. It must be remembered, however, that neither of them was accustomed to handling the brakes, and they were probably only beginning to get them under control when the horrible plunge off the mountain side was taken.

"Mr. Eastman was a very talented youth, a tall,

handsome fellow, who stood high in the esteem of his employer. He hailed from Crescent, Mr. Bell's native town, where his widowed mother and a sister are now mourning their terrible loss."

For ten minutes Breck sat there, on one of the lowermost of the rocky steps, staring at the paper he held in his hand, which the wind and sun were fast drying.

The river swirled and eddied at his feet, while a robin flew out from the top of the cliff overhead, circled down past his face and then darted away to the other side of the stream, where, lighting on a tree near the bank, it thrilled out a song of seeming joy at the beauty of the day.

But Breck heard nothing, saw nothing except the printed sheet before him which conveyed the awful news that now they had nothing to look for from the outside world, that they must remain where they were till——

Would it be till the end came for each of them by starvation, so that the newspaper's obituaries ; would not be so very ill-timed, after all ?

"No, no, it cannot be possible !"

Breck spoke the words almost aloud, and lifting his head, looked across at the opposite shore, seeming so near and yet so inaccessible. His eyes fell

on the robin, which, even as he looked, left his perch and came flying back to the crags above the boy's head.

"If you were only a carrier pigeon now," thought Breck, and then, as his eyes dropped to the stream again, he remembered that here was one sort of carrying power at his very feet.

We might write out an account of our plight, put it in a bottle and fling it into the river," he told himself, "just as though we were adrift on a water logged ship in mid ocean. I don't know, though, but we'd be a good deal better off then than now. There'd be chances of a vessel coming along at any minute there, but here—well, railroad cars generally cruise on their own tracks. But I'm not going to stay caged up like a mouse in a trap. There *must* be some way of getting across on the other side, and I'm going to make it my business to find it. And now, what shall I do with this paper? Mrs. Bell must be kept from knowing what it contains at all costs. I suppose I ought to fling it back in the river, but," and he smiled faintly, "it isn't every fellow who has the chance of reading his own obituary, so I think I'll hide it away somewhere in my room. It will be an interesting souvenir of the tour when I get home."

In spite of himself, Breck's spirits began to mount,

even as he turned and ascended the steps in the rock to the top of the plateau. Was it not probable, in the light of the theory advanced by the newspaper in his pocket, that he had saved the lives of the party in the Starling in a double sense, even though he had been the indirect cause of their present imprisonment? For had they escaped a collision with the Eastern Express, could they have rounded that curve on the high bluff above the river without the very accident occurring that Mr. Bell and their other friends believed had befallen them?

Just as Breck arrived at this conclusion he reached the top of the rocky staircase and came face to face with Marie.

"Oh, I was looking for you," she exclaimed. "Poor aunty is in a dreadful state, really out of her head, raving about uncle's not caring for her any more or he would surely have come to look for us before this, and taking on dreadfully. We've said all we could to comfort her, but that isn't much, because it *is* queer, you must admit, that nobody comes, even though that switch was left turned the wrong way. A railroad car isn't like a ship and can't sink out of sight, so they must know the Starling is somewhere."

For answer Breck put his hand in his pocket, drew out the paper the river had cast up at his feet,

and handed it to his companion, pointing to the leading article on the front page.

"Oh," the girl gasped and would have fallen had not Breck put out his arm and gently drawn her to a seat on a bowlder that chanced to be close at hand.

"But—how—where—did this come from?" she asked, looking up at him after she had glanced at the sheet again and read the date line.

Breck briefly explained and then added: "Do you think we ought to show this to your aunt?"

"Oh, I don't know. It is dreadful, isn't it?" Then, as she took up the paper again and glanced down the double leaded columns, she shuddered and cried out: "Our death notices," and then buried her face in her hands.

Breck remained standing beside her, silent for a moment, then, when the first shock had had its sting taken out of it, he began to talk quietly about how much better they were off than if what the paper said was true, that if no hunter or backwoodsman chanced to discover their whereabouts, they would surely be able to find some means of escape.

"It can't be possible," he concluded, "that we can be kept prisoners long in the heart of our own country I mean to try what I can do on the other side of the plateau this very day."

Cheered by his words of encouragement, Marie

soon regained control of herself, and turning to her companion with a smile said: "You do me lots of good talking that way. I don't know what we would do if it wasn't for you."

"You wouldn't be here for one thing," rejoined Breck, smiling in return.

"But we might have been there," answered Marie solemnly, pointing to the river.

At this instant Deane came up. He was haggard and wild-looking, and dropping on the ground beside the bowlder, he broke out into bitter complaining at their fate.

"This is insufferable," he began, "to be cooped up on a rock island like this with a prospect of starvation staring us in the face. If uncle had been coming for us at all he'd surely have turned up before this, and he would have, if it hadn't been for you," he added, pounding his clinched hand nervously on the flinty ground and looking vindictively at Breck.

"Oh, Deane, don't say that!" put in Marie. "Here, look at that and see where you might have been if it hadn't been for Mr. Eastman."

As she spoke the girl took the paper from her lap and passed it to her cousin, adding an explanation of how it had come to them.

The boy's face paled as he read, and when he nally understood that all efforts at finding them had

been abandoned, he gave vent to a burst of combined anger and despair that was terrible to witness. For his was a thoroughly selfish nature, with none of the heroic elements in it, and having always been surrounded by the conventionalities of life, he was ill prepared to face any reverses of fortune. On the death of his parents Mr. Bell had adopted him as his own son, and his every wish had been gratified. And now, to think that this tour in a private car, an experience he had looked forward to as one of the greatest enjoyments of his life, should end as it had done—this broke the back of all Deane's self-respect and gallantry, and he proceeded to "make a baby of himself" as Breck afterwards expressed it, in the very presence of his fair young cousin.

Any words of attempted consolation or encouragement were thrown away on him while the paroxysm lasted, and finally Marie suggested that they leave him to himself.

"I only hope he won't take on this way before Aunt Gertrude," she added, as she walked back to the car with Breck.

"What about showing her the paper?" the latter inquired again.

"I'll ask what mother thinks," was the reply. "It seems to me we ought to do it in justice to Uncle Archibald. And then we can tell her that you may find a way to get to Tipton this afternoon."

CHAPTER XII.

A RAY OF HOPE.

"FIND a way to get to Tipton this afternoon!"

Breck repeated these words to himself as he strolled off to the further side of the plateau. How would if be possible to do this? Had he not already investigated every possible means of escape, and found all impracticable?

But he walked on till he stood once more on the edge of the chasm, which ran sheer down for over a hundred feet to the stony gully below.

"If I could only get down there," he mused, "I might manage to find a way of getting out on the other side. "It doesn't seem like such a creviceless wall as this one."

He leaned back against a bowlder and earnestly scrutinized the opposite cliff.

Its face was certainly jagged and uneven; here and there a bush grew out of an interstice in the rocks, and——

"Great George, there's something that looks like a path!" Breck suddenly exclaimed aloud.

"Where?" Deane had come up unperceived behind him, and now seized him by the arm in excited fashion, while his eyes followed the direction of young Eastman's eager gaze.

"Why, look, yonder," returned Breck, pointing to a spot near the foot of the opposite crag, and some twenty yards from where they stood. "See, just by that rift in the rock. Doesn't that look like a path? It goes upward, too. Come, see if we can find where it leads."

Excitedly the two, each forgetting the unpleasant circumstances under which they had just parted, hurried along the edge of the precipice till they came to its further end, where it overhung the river.

Halting here, Breck shaded his eyes, and, peering up the valley, reported that the path continued to ascend as far as he could see.

"But what good will that do us?" muttered Deane, gloomily. "It's on the other side and we're on this."

"If I could only find rope enough, I'd soon remedy that."

"Oh, could you? Will you venture down, Eastman. I—I don't think it would be so very dangerous."

Deane's manner approached as close to the gracious as it had ever done with Breck, but with the latter this counted for little. He saw only too clearly the reason for this spasm of friendliness.

"Dangerous or not," he rejoined, "it is the only thing to be done. But we must first get a rope, and a tremendously long one. And I don't know where there is such a thing, do you?"

"Not unless we can find it in that old barracks of a hotel. I move we explore it. I noseyed about the place this morning, and found that a couple of good blows with an axe would break in the door."

"Come on. The sooner the better. I'll go to the Starling for the axe kept in case of accident. I remember seeing it stuck up right near my door."

While procuring this, Breck took the opportunity to see Marie and report the hopeful outlook that had just opened up to them.

"And even if it doesn't amount to anything," the brave girl replied, "it will give Deane something to do and to think about except our forlorn situation. I think now I'd better show that paper to Aunt Gertrude."

Breck hurried off with the axe to the Inland Island House, and with a single blow split the weather-beaten front door in twain so that it fell apart and made an entrance way. The very sound of the

blow was hope inspiring. After the inaction of the past two days, work of any sort seemed to mean deliverance.

The two boys rushed in and looked curiously about them. All was bare. Even the desk that had been built into the hallway to serve office purposes, had been removed, and simply walls, floor and ceiling remained.

"No good of exploring the upper floors now," said Breck, as Deane started to go upstairs. "It's scarcely likely we'll find what we want there. We'd better go down cellar. Have you got a match? Or wait, I'll run back to the car for the lantern."

While the other was gone, Deane took pains to wait for him out on the piazza, in the brilliant sunlight.

Breck soon returned with the lamp, but the most pains-taking search all through the lower floors and cellars of the building failed to reveal even so much as a piece of clothes line.

"One thing is plain," remarked Breck, as they gave up the quest. "When the owner left the place, he never expected to come back here again."

"But what are we going to do for our rope?"

Deane's face had grown long again, and he looked dolefully at the dirt on his hands he had gathered

from poking them into out of the way corners in the cellar.

"I've been thinking," responded Breck, slowly, "that we'll have to do what you always read is done in stories when a boy escapes at dead of night, from boarding school for a frolic, or leaves the home of a crabbed uncle to run away to sea."

"Oh, you mean to tie a lot of sheets together," put in Deane, with a laugh.

"Yes. I don't see what else we can do. I should think there ought to be enough aboard the Starling. I know Mr. Bell didn't calculate on having the washing done very often, and ordered a heavy stock laid in to do away with the necessity of it."

"Let's go back and find out right away," proposed Deane, and the two reached the car just in time for lunch.

At this meal, which had been got up very creditably by Marie, with Estelle's assistance, neither Mrs. Bell nor Mrs. Granville appeared.

"I showed aunt the paper," Marie reported to Breck, "and, though of course she was terribly shocked to read her own death notice—as who wouldn't be?—still I could see that it relieved her mind about Uncle Archibald, and explained the mystery of his not looking for us."

As soon as lunch was over, the three young people instituted a search for the linen closet, which they found after, it seemed to them, opening every other door in the car.

The supply of sheets was not as large as Breck had supposed, and it was finally determined that each one must be split in half.

"Then we'll have to tie pieces of wood across at regular intervals," Breck explained. "That'll help strengthen it, and make a kind of ladder out of the thing."

"But where'll we get the sticks?" Deane wanted to know.

"Chop up the hotel for them," returned the young stenographer with a smile, and, shouldering the handsomely painted axe, he started off, leaving Deane to aid Marie in dividing the sheets.

There was work enough to keep the three busy all the afternoon and far into the evening, but nobody minded that; not even Deane, who became positively good-natured as a result of the new hope that had been born within him.

Mrs. Bell appeared at dinner, and took the deepest interest in the preparations. By eleven o'clock a line that Breck calculated must be over seventy-five feet in length lay coiled up on the floor of the saloon with cross pieces of stout pine wood fastened securely

to it at regular intervals about two feet apart. It was arranged that Breck should make the descent the first thing in the morning, so as to give him the benefit of all the daylight possible to find his way to the nearest town.

"But where are you going to fasten your rope to?" asked Mrs. Granville. "That is a matter of prime importance."

"I have thought of that," answered Breck. "I think it will be long enough to reach to the car, so that we can tie the end to the railing on the platform. then I want a pillow put under it where it passes over the edge of the cliff so that it shan't chafe."

Although he fully realized the hazardous nature of the undertaking, Breck did not feel in the least nervous so far as his personal safety was concerned. All he worried over was the uncertainty as to whether or not his attempt would result in freeing the party from their strange imprisonment. What if that path in the face of the opposite cliff came to an abrupt termination just out of sight? Would not all these preparations and his perilous journey have been made in vain?

But then, on the other hand, there was the possibility, nay, the probability, that it did not so terminate, but led straight to the upper world again, and rescue for them all.

"I won't think of any but the bright side," he resolved, and with this hopeful feeling dominant within him, went to bed and slept soundly till the dawn of the day which was to be such a momentous one to them all.

CHAPTER XIII.

A VISION OF TANTALUS.

Breck has never forgotten the strange atmosphere that seemed to pervade the Starling that morning of the memorable attempt. Everybody was up with the first streak of day, and the bustle over getting breakfast reminded him of the times when he wanted to catch an early train at home.

How different, though, were the circumstances now! Surely but few before him had ever got up at daylight to set out on such a singular journey.

While he ate the cold tongue, bread and butter, cheese, and jam which Estelle had brought him, the rest all sat around the room watching him in a kind of awe. Then Marie suddenly bethought herself that, if it took him all day to reach civilization, he ought to take along a lunch; and, hurrying off to her room, she soon returned with an old school satchel she had brought along on the tour to hold moss. This she

proceeded to fill with sandwiches and prunes, and insisted that Breck should sling it over his shoulder when he was ready to make the descent.

"All ready now!" finally announced the hero of the occasion, rising from his chair and catching up the coil of halved sheets.

All, even to Mrs. Bell, followed him out of the car and stood grouped on the platform, watching while he and Deane had an amateur tug of war to test the strength of the improvised rope.

This having resulted satisfactorily, one end was carefully fastened to the railing, and Marie came forward with the pillow to place on the edge of the cliff. Then the rope was let down, with a crimson silk handkerchief of Deane's—who affected Harvard—tied to its end, to ascertain whether it would be long enough.

Anxiously all peered over the side as the conspicuous "tailpiece" went down, down, till brains grew dizzy as its course was followed. But presently a shout from Breck apprised the watchers that bottom had been reached, and there was still some six feet of rope to spare.

"Now, I'm off!" went on young Eastman, getting down on his knees preparatory to backing over the edge of the cliff.

"Oh, don't, don't! You will fall. This is dread-

ful." Mrs. Bell clasped her hand over her eyes and shrank back into Marie's arms.

"But he must go, Aunt Gertrude," said the latter softly, "if we are to have help sent us. And the rope is strong enough. You saw them test it. But come, go back in the car with me. It makes you too nervous to stay here and see it all."

But Mrs. Bell insisted on remaining, and stood with tightly compressed lips while Breck said a brave good-bye, doffed his cap politely, and then backed over the precipice.

Mrs. Bell fainted dead away as he disappeared, and, leaving her to the care of her mother and Estelle, Marie sprang to the edge and watched Breck's downward progress with a wildly beating heart. What if the test had not been a sufficient one, or suppose one of the cross pieces should break? But Marie dared not think of the consequences in that event, she tried only to think of the bravery of the heroic boy who was risking his life for them all in making this perilous descent.

Slowly he went down, carefully feeling his way from round to round, of what might be called his one-sided ladder. He kept his eyes fixed on his starting point, where Marie's face looked down at him; and earnestly did the girl strive not to let any of the terror in her heart appear there.

Deane stood there too, and the boy Willie, with wide open eyes, wondering what it all meant.

And Breck, what were his sensations all this time?

Well, for one thing, there was very little of the element of fear in them. He knew that that would only unnerve him, and so, to guard against it, he never once looked down, but centered his gaze on that sweet, girlish face at the top of the cliff, and his thoughts on the task that awaited him after reaching the bottom of the ravine.

And so at last the ordeal was over, his feet touched a bowlder at the foot of the cliff, and his voice sent up a cheery shout of "All right. I've got here."

And now began what Breck really considered the most difficult part of his undertaking. That was to cross to the other side of the ravine and find the means of getting started in that seeming pathway that ran along the face of the opposite precipice.

The hardships of the route confronted him now at the very outset, for the bowlder on which he had landed was some twenty feet in height and separated from all the others by a space too wide to be leaped. But by dint of letting himself down backward over the edge and clinging with his hands till the last possible minute, Breck managed to drop to the marshy ground beneath without serious discomfort.

Now, however, he seemed to be in a sort of pen,

for the other bowlders touched one another so closely that there was no working his way between them, while the smallest of them was at least four feet higher than his head.

"But I haven't got as low down as this to be balked now," Breck said to himself, and he studied this "Baby" bowlder long and carefully till at length he discovered a projection where he could manage to get a handhold.

Then he worked his way up, to stand on the top and wave his cap in triumph to Marie and Deane on Power's Folly, far far above him.

The rest of the passage to the other side of the gully, was a comparatively easy one. Many of the bowlders were close enough together to permit of the intervening space being jumped, while, when that was not the case, they were small enough to be scaled without much trouble.

But when Breck reached the point where what he had taken for a path started, his heart quailed for an instant. For it was a projection of a lower stratum of rocks out from the upper strata barely a foot in width, while the face of the cliff was perfectly smooth, affording not the faintest support for the fingers in case of misstep.

Still, with the exercise of due caution, it was not impossible of passage, and Breck wasted no time in

doubts and forebodings, but started off on this new stage of his journey at once. First, however, he turned to give another cheering signal to the watchers on the opposite cliff, for after he had set out his face would be towards the rocks, so that he did not expect to have an opportunity to look at them again for some time.

It was a tedious journey, for he had to move sidewise, and was kept constantly turning his head to make sure that the path did not suddenly come to an end. And then it was so terribly hot.

The sun poured down upon him relentlessly and the face of the cliff soon became so warm that he could scarcely bear his hands upon it. But he pushed on, noting with satisfaction that he was ever ascending higher and higher, but resolutely putting from his mind the temptation to look down and see how far up in the air he was.

Once the path narrowed so that he was afraid he could go no further; but seeing that it was only a temporary encroachment, he persevered, and moving with the utmost caution, succeeded in passing the critical point.

And now hope of successfully accomplishing his mission swelled within him. He thought of what a sensation it would create all over the country when the news was telegraphed that the Starling had not

taken that fatal plunge into the river after all. And what joy the tidings would carry to his mother and sister who at this very moment must be mourning him as dead!

With these cheerful reflections uppermost in his mind, Breck suddenly caught sight of that which dashed them all to the ground, as it were. For rounding a sort of curve he glanced ahead and saw that the path, a few feet further on, went off into space.

And the cliff still towered some forty feet above him!

Something very like despair came over him as mechanically he pushed his way onward for the few remaining steps of progress he could make. And then hope, clothed anew in alluring aspect, presented herself before him in the shape of an opening in the face of the cliff, very like a cave, high enough for him to enter without stooping. He had thoughtfully provided himself with some wax matches, and striking one of these, he entered the cavern and fearlessly strode forward. It had a downward trend and "It is very possible it may come out on level ground," Breck told himself with buoyant spirits.

This was much easier traveling than his progress along the face of the cliff had been, but presently his head struck the roof and Breck was admonished that

the cavern was growing smaller. His match went out at the same instant, and then, peering ahead, he distinctly saw a patch of daylight glimmering in the distance.

Hastily lighting another match, he bent his shoulders and resumed the march. But very soon something more than bent shoulders was necessary, and at last he was reduced to crawling in order to get along.

"I hope there are no snakes hereabouts," he reflected.

Still, he was so excited by the prospect of speedy exit into a part of the country whence it would be possible for him to make his way to the haunts of civilization, that he gave small heed to possible incidentals in the path. Already he could see the blue sky beyond the opening ahead.

But at this instant the roof of the cave descended still closer to the floor, and caught his shoulder.

Dropping flat on his chest he tried to wriggle the rest of the way, certainly not more than fifteen feet, but it might as well have been a thousand, for his shoulders soon caught again, and with a feeling of despair, such as he had never before experienced, Breck realized that although he was on the verge of success he could get no further.

CHAPTER XIV.

OUT IN THE STORM.

"THE feast of Tantalus was as nothing compared with this!" groaned Breck, as he wriggled and squirmed in the effort to push himself through the contracted mouth of the cavern.

But the only result of his struggles was the bruising of his shoulders and back.

"It's no use," he muttered. "I might just as well make up my mind to that first as last, and imagine this end of the cave to be walled up. But to have come so far, and over such a course, for this! I suppose there's nothing for it, however, but to turn around and go back."

Looking at his watch, he found that it was after nine o'clock, so that it had taken him all of three hours to make his journey from the top of Power's Folly to this point.

"I'll get back in time for lunch," he reflected.

But with the thought came also the recollection that there was a limit to the supplies aboard the Starling. Suppose the party should be compelled to remain on that stretch of isolated table land for three, six, twelve months! The larder, he was certain, could not hold out for even the first-named period, and what then? To be sure, Mr. Bell's and the Doctor's shotguns and rifles were aboard, but there was no game to shoot at.

"Great Cæsar, though!" suddenly exclaimed Breck aloud. "We can fire the guns, and that may bring anybody within hearing to find out what it means. Queer we didn't think of it before."

Inspired by the idea, he partially forgot the deep disappointment attending his exploration of the cave. Backing out of his narrow quarters, he moved along as fast as he could in the darkness, for he did not care to waste another match now that he had once been over the route.

When he reached the mouth of the cave. He found a high gale of wind blowing. Fortunately it was from the other side of the ravine, so it would aid rather than endanger his progress along the narrow footway.

Still, the whistling of the wind as it swept through the narrow gorge was sufficiently startling for one in Breck's position to listen to, and he hurried all he

could, fearful lest rain might follow, for the sky was already overcast. At last he gained the spot where he had taken the path, swung himself down to one of the huge bowlders, beneath, and—suddenly stopped short, with a recollection of the height of the rock on which he had landed and above which he could now see the rope still dangling.

How was he to reach its top? It was one thing to drop from a height and quite another to climb up to the same eminence.

Confidently expecting that his journey would have a successful issue, and that when he again returned to Power's Folly it would be by a bridge flung across the rapids by a party of rescuers, he had given no thought, till this moment, to the "return trip" via the face of the cliff.

"Well, it is simply impossible for me to scale that particular bowlder," he told himself. "I'll have to signal to them to haul up the line and let it down in another place."

Rising to his feet again, Breck made a trumpet of his hands and called with the full force of his lungs: "Deane, oh, Deane, come to the bluff!"

But the wind seemed to catch the sound and carry it skurrying along with itself down the ravine. Eagerly he kept his eyes fastened on the opposite cliff, but no one appeared there.

The rope by which he had descended, caught by the wind, swung out from the rocks every now and then, seemingly to mock him, but this was all there was to give evidence that there had ever been a living soul on the top of that wild and barren plateau.

Breck waited five minutes, then called again. Still no response for either eye or ear. Still another call, this time a shrill and prolonged one, but the wind had increased in force, and even as he shouted Breck was conscious of the fact that he could not be heard.

"Of course they did not expect me back so soon," he told himself, "so they are probably all in the Starling."

What should he do? It would be of no use to retrace his steps. There was no possibility that the opening of the cavern had grown larger during his absence.

The only thing open to him seemed to be to wait as patiently as he could till the wind died down or some one came to the edge of the cliff.

He was about to turn around to look for the most comfortable resting place, when his eye caught sight of something at the further end of Power's Folly that inspired him to shout again and wave his handkerchief wildly.

What he saw was a bit of red cloth that he recognized as the dress Marie had worn that morning.

By keeping his eyes fixed on it he presently made out the wearer, who at that instant stepped nearer the edge of the cliff, and then he saw that she was shading her eyes with her hand and gazing intently up the canyon.

"Looking for me," Breck thought, with a strange thrill at his heart. "Oh, if she would only turn around.!"

Again and again Breck shouted, waved his hat, his hands and even his lunch bag, but the wind took all sound in the opposite direction, and the girl was gazing so intently at the point where she evidently thought it possible she might obtain some glimpse of him of whom she was in search that she never once turned her face the other way.

"She couldn't have been on the lookout when I came back," Breck told himself. "Oh, she's given it up now and gone back to the car."

The next minute he discovered what had doubtless caused her to abandon her position. It had begun to rain.

"And now's the time I'm in luck to have it blowing such a gale to give the storm a slant," soliloquized Breck, as he hastily left the top of the bowlder, on which he had been standing, slid down on the lee side and cuddled close up to the cold stone.

It was but poor shelter at best, and by and by the

water began to collect into pools on the stony ground at his feet and make things decidedly uncomfortable for him.

"But at any rate my head and shoulders are protected," he thought, "and that's better than being caught out on the plains without any covering whatever."

And so the minutes and hours passed till a still deeper darkening of the heavens told that night was approaching. And still no cessation in the storm, and while that continued Breck knew it would be useless to hope to attract the attention of any of his party.

"I dare say they are comfortably ensconced in the Starling," he said to himself, "looking forward to the time when I shall come back to them with help and deliverance from the outer world."

Oh, what a dreary, dreary time it was for the boy! Nothing to do but think and wait, and hug close to that cold mass of rock in the effort to get as much as possible of his body out of the pitiless storm. And the thoughts were by no means as cheerful ones as they might have been had this interruption to his journey occurred on his outward trip, *before* he had discovered the hopelessness of escape by means of that path along the cliff; while the waiting was not attended by that sure confidence of a happy outcome

as soon as the rain should cease, as would have been the case had he been merely detained by the storm in "the upper world" within easy reach of shelter.

He had long ago eaten half the lunch Marie's thoughtfulness had provided for him.

"I must save some of it for to-morrow," he told himself, "for even if the wind does go down there is no knowing how long it will take me to attract the attention of the people up there. If that other opening to the tunnel had only been a trifle larger, or I a good deal smaller."

With this last reflection an idea flashed into his mind that caused him to slap his thigh and fling back his head with a recklessness that gave the latter a sharp crack against the rock.

"Great Cæsar, that's the very thing to do. How absurd in me not to think of it before. And there will be what you might call poetic justice in the scheme. He got us into the scrape and can be the means of getting us out of it."

CHAPTER XV.

A GUN IS FIRED.

WILLIE PELTON! That was the magic name that revived hope and courage in poor wet, bedraggled Breck. Willie was only ten and small for his age, so that there was little doubt of his being able to worm himself through the mouth of the cavern. He (Breck) could pilot him safely along the pathway in the face of the cliff and through the tunnel, and then——

A sudden thought checked the youth in his enthusiasm over the scheme. Would it be right to send such a little fellow out into a strange country to wander about by himself?

"But I guess he's not the kind to lose his head," was the reassuring thought that presently came to Breck. "A boy that can get on the platform of a car and be the means of sending it off on a wild run down a grade ought certainly to be able to make his way from the end of that tunnel to Queen Junction, which

I imagine can't be very far away. We can give him a letter to take along that will fully explain everything, and the next day there ought to be a lot of men here."

So excited did Breck become, thinking over this most feasible of all plans for the deliverance of the Starling and her party that even when the rain presently subsided to a drizzle and the pools of water about his feet disappeared, he found it hard to compose his mind for slumber. For it had long since become pitch dark and he had quite reconciled himself to spending the night where he was.

"What a sensation it will make all over the country," he reflected, "when Willie's note is delivered and the news is flashed over the wires that Mr. Bell's private car did *not* take that fatal plunge into the river but is cast away on an inland island in regular Robinson Crusoe fashion? And mother and Helen! I wonder if they will see it the first thing. No, I must not risk leaving them in their sorrow a moment longer than is absolutely necessary. I'll write out a telegram and give it to Willie to take along with him. I've got plenty of money to pay for sending it," and as he jingled the small change in one of his pockets, Breck realized that there was one favorable feature of their enforced detention at Power's Folly if no other—there was no drain on his purse.

At last, however, pure weariness of body asserted itself, and the boy who had gone through so much that day fell into a dream-troubled sleep.

He thought he was an engineer of a locomotive, attached to a Vestibuled Express. They were behind time and were shooting at lightning speed over the prairie straight toward a tunnel in a rock-faced mountain. Faster and faster they ran, and closer they came to the opening in the mountain. But suddenly the young engineer perceives that the mouth of the tunnel is contracting in size instead of growing larger as it ought to do as they draw nearer to it.

In alarm he applies the brake and tries to stop the train till the phenomenon can be explained. But it is too late; they are already too close to the spot.

Smaller and smaller grows the opening, till, just as the engine is up to it, there is nothing to be seen but a mass of solid rock, and the speed scarcely slackened in any degree. A terrible catastrophe is inevitable. Breck closes his eyes just as the crash comes and then—opens them in reality to find the sun shining brightly down upon him, a rope hitting him in the face, and Deane's voice calling from clear above somewhere: "Ahoy, down there! What's the matter?"

Joyfully he sprang to his feet, and looking up saw not only Deane, but Marie and little Willie Pelton

gazing down at him over the edge of Power's Folly. Waiting only to answer the hail with an eager: "Is the rope all safe?" and receiving to this the response: "Yes, come ahead," he began to mount with all speed.

Within ten minutes he was at the top and Deane had hauled him over the brink, at the same time deluging him with questions.

"What were you doing down there? Why did you come back that way? Couldn't you get word to anybody? How far did that path run?"

"Tell me first," demanded Breck, as soon as he was on his feet and had recovered his breath, "how that rope happened to hit me in the face. When I got back here yesterday, it was away off on top of a big bowlder and I am positive was not long enough to reach to the spot where you found me."

"Yesterday?" echoed Deane and Marie in a breath.

"Yes," returned Breck, and he then explained how the wind had carried his voice off in another direction, and that he had been obliged to spend the night out of doors. Then with a sudden recollection he looked at his watch and discovered that it was eleven o'clock.

"I must have slept pretty late!" he exclaimed.

"I should say you did, and soundly, too," rejoined

Deane, as they all started toward the Starling. "I found you there about an hour ago, and after hallooing till I was hoarse, I hauled up the line, got Marie to help me, and added a piece till we made it long enough to reach down to you, and so wakened you by touch instead of sound. But now tell us what you have done. Why didn't you stay with the men, and when are they coming to get us out of this hole?"

"I hope in a day or two," returned Breck, letting his eyes fall on Willie Pelton, who had put a hand in his and was walking along by his side, every now and then turning his head to look at the heroic youth who had gone down the side of the cliff.

"Whom did you see?" asked Marie.

Breck was a trifle embarrassed. He disliked broaching the idea of sending Willie on the trip from which he himself had just returned unsuccessful, while the boy was present, and yet he did not care to let others experience the disappointment that had been his in connection with that *cul de sac* in the cave. So, to gain time, he evaded the question by exclaiming:

"Do you know there is one means of attracting help that we have quite ignored, and that is within our reach without moving from the car?"

"And what is that?"

Deane and Marie both forgot the questions they

had just put in their curiosity to know what possible chance of escape they had overlooked.

"The guns," was Breck's laconic reply.

"By Jove, that's so!" exclaimed, Deane, breaking away to make a dash for the car.

"Why, how could they help us?" inquired Marie.

"Why, in case we are near any settlement the noise of the firing may attract attention and bring some one in our neighborhood to find out what it means. You have seen no one in my absence, have you?"

"Not a soul but ourselves. But tell me, is this idea about firing a gun the sole fruit of your journey?"

"No indeed," and Breck was about to explain about the tunnel—for Willie had run off to the other end of the car, where Deane just then appeared, carrying Mr. Bell's rifle—when a stunning report and a piercing cry interrupted him.

Neither he nor Marie ever clearly remembered how they got over the stretch of ground, but an instant later they were both bending over Willie, who lay on his side with his head on the track, his face as pale as death and blood flowing from a spot in his right leg, just below the knee.

Deane stood leaning back against the doorway of

the car, the smoking gun still in his hand and his cheeks rivaling those of the boy in pallor.

"Have I killed him?" he muttered, as Mrs. Bell, Marie's mother and Estelle came rushing out with exclamations of terror.

CHAPTER XVI.

HOPEFUL HEARTS.

BRECK's father had been a doctor, and once or twice Breck had seen him examine and dress wounds. So now, as soon as he noticed the blood oozing from that spot in Willie's leg, he whipped out his knife, cut away the boy's knickerbockers, and was able to report the next instant that it was only a flesh wound.

"The bullet went through one side and out at the other," he said, "so no serious damage is done. I must bind it up, though, to stop the bleeding."

"I'll bring some strips of sheets we tore up for that rope and didn't use," and Marie flew off into the car.

Deane caught her as she was passing him.

"He—he isn't dead, is he?" he asked, huskily. "I didn't know he was coming, and I haven't any remembrance of pulling the trigger. It must have caught in the railing here."

His cousin stopped only long enough to assure him that Willie was merely scratched, and then hastened on after the bandages. Her mother, Mrs. Bell and Estelle were already busying themselves about the wounded boy, who had now opened his eyes and was gazing from one to the other wonderingly, evidently not quite comprehending why everybody seemed so suddenly interested in him.

Breck tried to prevent him from catching sight of the blood, and so far succeeded that for some time Willie believed that "the funny feeling in his leg" was caused by tripping over an outcropping rock and falling. Within ten minutes the wounded member was swathed in bandages, and the brave small boy—for he bore it all like a young Trojan—carried into the car and to his place in Breck's bed.

Then the others all assembled in the saloon, while Deane explained how it happened. It was the old, old plea of "Didn't know it was loaded," and as the thoroughly frightened youth realized what a very narrow escape there had been from a tragedy, his voice shook, and he concluded with these words:

"I guess you'd better do the signal firing, Eastman. That is, if you know anything at all about guns. I'm completely unnerved."

"But tell me first," Marie interposed, as Breck was about to depart, "what you were going to say when

—when the accident happened. You remember I asked you if gun firing was the only idea you brought back from your expedition, and you said, 'No, indeed,' and then Willie fell. What was the other thing?"

"I am afraid it has fallen through with Willie, at least for the present," answered Breck, with rather a forced smile.

"Fallen through with Willie? Another idea! Why, what do you mean, Eastman?"

This announcement created quite a sensation in the Starling. They all wanted to hear details of the discovery, so the firing of the gun was postponed until after lunch.

"How long do you suppose it will be before that boy is able to walk?" asked Deane, as he and Breck went outside to ascertain if the accidental going off of the rifle had attracted anybody to the neighborhood.

"I haven't the slightest idea. Maybe a week, maybe three. It's lucky the ball went clear through, for I don't know anything about probing for such things."

"By George, what a mess I've made of it by my awkwardness," muttered Deane, as they reached the river side of the plateau and peered in among the trees on the opposite bank without perceiving any

sign that that single shot had wrought anything but mischief for them.

"If that gun hadn't gone off that way we might have had the boy almost out of the cave by this time." Then, with sudden inspiration, he added, turning to look in a queer fashion at Breck, from head to toe, and back again: "Perhaps I could get through myself. I'm slimmer than you are by a good deal. Then we needn't wait till the boy gets well. Come on, let's start this very afternoon, for I want you to go along to show me the way."

Breck shook his head.

"I'm sure you couldn't squeeze through," he said. "The place where I stuck is not the smallest part of the tunnel."

"But did you thoroughly explore the place?" retorted Deane. "Perhaps there is some other opening that you did not notice."

"I don't see how there can be, but if you like I'll go there with you to-morrow morning. That is, if you don't think it's unwise to leave the ladies alone."

Deane laughed.

"I only wish there was anybody near enough to make it a little risky to do it," he said, adding: "It's settled, then, that you and I start together on an exploring trip in the morning. This afternoon, then, we can devote to firing the guns. That is, you can, for I

don't want to touch one of the things yet awhile."

Deane seemed to forget his agitation in the curiosity now awakened in him.

"The simple fact of the matter is," responded Breck, "that that path along the cliff leads to a cave whose other outlet is so small that only a boy like Willie can crawl through it."

Breck could not help but notice the change that had come over Deane since the discovery that there was a possibility of their speedily escaping from Power's Folly. He was now pleasant, almost genial in his manner, exemplifying in the most undeniable fashion the softening and humanizing influences of hope. Breck wondered whether, when this memorable episode in the tour of the Starling should be nothing but a memory, the old haughty, "I am better than you" air would reassert itself.

The party that gathered about the lunch table that day was lighter in spirits than at any time since the car had occupied its peculiar position on this isolated plateau. There were two reasons for this: one the reaction from utter hopelessness brought about by Breck's discovery of the cave, and the other the gratitude of all that the shooting accident had not been more serious than it was.

And as he sat there at the table, glancing now and then out of the broad windows at the sunlight danc-

ing on the forest leaves across the ravine, Breck could scarcely realize that this was the same company with which he had started out from Philadelphia. It all seemed so strange. The magnificent fittings of the car, the handsome gowns worn by the ladies, the very fact, indeed, that they were seated in a vehicle that none but those who were possessed of great wealth could afford to own ; all this on the one hand, and on the other, the meager fare, consisting for the most part of crackers and preserves, on the table, and the recollection that the outside world believed them all to be dead—dashed to pieces on the rocks at the bottom of that river that he could hear rushing on its way at the foot of the cliff.

Luncheon over, Breck devoted an hour to overhauling Mr. Bell's stock of firearms, and then, having selected and loaded a double-barreled shotgun, went out to the edge of the plateau and fired twice up into the air. Then he and Deane gave vent to a series of cat cries and war whoops that Marie declared were enough to wake the dead ; but though they all kept watch till nightfall, none of the sounds seemed to have attracted the attention of any of the living outside of their own party.

" But Eastman and I are going to fix things to-morrow," said Deane, confidently, at the dinner-table.

Breck did not feel so sanguine, but he did not give

voice to his doubts. Besides, if failure waited on the next day's expedition, there was Willie Pelton to fall back upon—if they were content to wait long enough.

The boy was bearing his confinement heroically. The two ladies had passed the afternoon with him so as to give him company, and were loud in their praises of his fortitude and grit.

"Poor little fellow," said Mrs. Bell, "I am afraid we have been rather neglectful of him till this accident happened. Even if he was the cause of all our trouble, he is but a child, and must miss his home terribly."

The next morning dawned cloudy, with a keen wind from the east blowing, but Deane would not listen to any postponement.

"If it begins to storm," he argued, "with the wind from this quarter, it may keep it up for three days, and we'll be just that much delayed. On the other hand, it may not begin to rain before night, by which time we may be safe at Queen Junction."

So he carried his point, the improvised ladder was let down again, and the two boys set out, little anticipating what was to befall them ere they saw their friends in the Starling again.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE MAN IN THE CANOE.

In selecting the spot from which to launch the improvised ladder for this second expedition, Breck profited by past experience, and so arranged matters that when he and Deane reached the bottom of the ravine there was no occasion for them to risk their necks by jumping from the top of huge bowlders. But Deane seemed to think that the mere matter of descent was a sufficiently dangerous one, and consumed twice as much time in that process as his companion.

But at last both were started on that narrow pathway along the face of the opposite cliff, and Deane had begun to enthuse over all that he would accomplish after they should arrive at the cavern, when his ardor was considerably dampened by a big rain drop that struck him in the back of the neck.

"By George," he exclaimed, "the storm's begun!"

"Well, do you want to go back?" asked Breck.

"How far is it to the cave from here?" rejoined Deane. "Are we half way?"

"Just about."

"Well, then I move we go on. We'll be all right as soon as we get there."

"Just as you say," rejoined Breck, and they pressed on as fast as they could with the sideways motion they were obliged to adopt.

Faster and faster fell the rain, the wind increasing in equal ratio.

"This is fearful," finally muttered Deane.

He was drenched through and through, his hair at the back was as wet as though he had been in swimming, and already his teeth were chattering with cold. Breck was in equally bad plight, but being of sturdier frame and of a more extensive outdoor experience than the other, he stood it better.

"Do you want to go back now, then?" he asked.

"Oh, no, it would be worse than keeping on—all this water beating down on us as we worked our way up that ladder. Isn't there any kind of shelter along here?"

Deane stopped, and, turning a little so as to glance downward, looked eagerly along the face of the cliff for some nook that might at least partially screen them from the storm. But all he saw that in any way

approached what they wanted was a sort of shallow cavity in the rock at a point some twenty yards further on and close down by the stream, where the land jutted out in a kind of point. As the wind was blowing from the other direction, the rain was not driven in just here.

"Look, Eastman," said Deane. "Can't we get down there?"

For a time it seemed that there was no possible way of doing this. They were now some forty feet above the surface of the stream, and apparently the intervening space was smooth, perpendicular rock.

"Let's go on a little farther," suggested Breck. "It's raining so hard I can't get a good view."

He led the way, keeping as much of his gaze as was not required to retain his footing, on the stony face of the cliff below them. Presently he halted and called Deane's attention to three projecting points of rock.

"If we are very careful," he said, "we may be able to get down there by these. But remember, the rain has made them very slippery, and you know what a single misstep means. Shall we try it? If we let ourselves over the side very cautiously, and feel about with our toe for a resting place before letting go, I don't think there is so much danger. Luckily the edge of the ledge is somewhat jagged."

"Anything is better than this. I was a fool to come, when the weather looked so threatening," admitted Deane. "Go on; I'll follow."

"I wonder if they—if Marie can see us from the Folly?" Breck asked himself, as slowly and cautiously he sank to his knees, and put first one foot and then the other over the side of the path.

It seemed a fearfully hazardous thing to do, but by refraining from undue haste, Breck finally found himself standing safely on the little ledge that jutted out from the cliff some six feet below the footpath.

Deane could not follow till Breck had gone to the next one, for the ledge was only large enough to hold one at a time, and he called out to Breck to hurry and make his next move. But this was a matter of increased difficulty, as the edge of his support was perfectly smooth, and there was great danger of his hands slipping when he swung out to reach the next lower stage.

Breck, however, made a brave start, and had launched one foot out into space when he was nearly thrown off his balance by hearing Deane suddenly call out: "Oh, I say, Eastman, I've just thought of one thing. How are we going to get back?"

This would be rather more difficult than the descent, and with considerable nervousness Breck pulled himself up on the ledge again and reached out

his arms toward the projection on which Deane stood. They fell short about half a foot, and Breck recollected that he had been obliged to drop a few inches when he made the descent.

"I guess you'll have to lend me a hand and haul me up, Bell," he said, "and we'll have to find another shelter."

"Why, how's that?" asked Deane, as rather gingerly he dropped to his knees on the damp rock and reached down toward his companion. "What's the matter with our hauling one another up, after the storm's over, the way I'm going to do with you now?"

"But when we're both down here, who's going to help the first man up?" rejoined Breck, with a laugh.

"That's so. What an idiot I am to—no, I'm not. Great Scott! Get out of the way, there, Eastman! I'm coming down. Hel—lo, wait for us!"

Deane's whole manner had suddenly undergone a complete change. Dropping Breck's hands at imminent risk of letting him fall over backward, he sprang to his feet for an instant, gave the shout already recorded, waved his hat frantically about his head, and then, turning round, prepared to drop to the ledge on which Breck was perched.

Although as yet wholly ignorant of the reason

for this apparently contradictory behavior, there was nothing for Breck to do but to let himself down to the projection below with all possible speed. He did take time, however, to call up to Deane: "What on earth's the matter with you? What have you seen?"

"A man in a canoe! He's waiting for us at the bottom."

This was all that was required to make Breck as excited as his companion, and, without stopping to turn around and look for himself, he concentrated his attention on descending the face of the cliff as rapidly as possible.

And how suddenly the whole current of his thoughts had been changed! But a moment ago he had been mentally bewailing what he could not but believe inwardly was the wild-goose chase on which they were bound.

Now his brain was nearly bursting with the possibilities that dawned upon him at the words, "a man in a canoe." How much it meant! Rescue of the Starling's party from their imprisonment, the flashing over the telegraph wires of the happy intelligence that those reported as dead were alive and well!

"Why, that man will become quite famous!" thought Breck. "I wonder who he is, and if he

came here on the chance of finding some trace of the Starling, or just by accident."

"It's queer he doesn't shout up to us!" was the next reflection.

"I say, Bell," he called to his follower, "are you sure the fellow saw you, and is waiting for us?"

"Yes," was the reassuring answer. "He put for the same shelter we are trying to make. Isn't it lucky we started out to-day?"

Breck had now reached a point where he could turn his head and look down at their destination without endangering his footing. And he certainly saw a singular sight on that bit of beach, beneath the shelter of the overhanging rock.

Drawn up out of reach of the current was a birch bark canoe, and standing by its side, with his back toward the boys so that his face was not visible, was a rather tall man, a battered beaver hat on the back of his head, where he had placed it to prevent its falling off as he bent over to wring the water out of his coat tails, which were preposterously long, so that he had no trouble in bringing them around in front of him for the purpose.

A gun lay in the canoe, and now, as Deane gave another "Hello, down there; don't go away; we're coming," the man quickly ceased his work on the coat tails, stooped over and picked up the gun,

straightened the hat on his head, and then looked around to face the new comers in rather a threatening attitude. Breck saw then that he was an Indian.

He was so astonished on making this discovery that he nearly lost his footing, and had he not steadied himself just in time, would have gone sliding down the declivity to the very feet of the stranger.

CHAPTER XVIII.

UP STREAM IN THE CANOE.

Now the party in the Starling had fallen in with several Indians on their tour; seen them lounging about frontier railroad stations or had them come up to the car windows to try and effect a trade. But somehow, although the traditional war-paint and feathers were lacking, there was something about the redskin with whom the two boys now found themselves confronted that was altogether different from the grinning stupidity or leer of greed that had been apparent on the faces of the "tame" savages they had hitherto encountered.

Deane, who had all along affected a lofty scorn for the "original Americans" as Marie persisted in calling them, as soon as he recovered from the natural surprise incident to finding that the man he had hailed belonged to the despised race, called down rather roughly:

"Here, my friend, drop that gun. We're not

going to hurt you. Don't you see we're unarmed?"

But the Indian never moved a muscle, merely stood there, gun in hand, as if bidding them come on at their peril.

"What shall we do, Bell?" Breck called back. "I don't believe the fellow understands English."

"Do?" retorted the other. "There's only one thing we *can* do, and that is, go forward. There's no retreating, as you just now yourself proved to me. Besides, who's afraid of an Indian nowadays? They've had the spirit and fight cowed out of them. Don't you understand? This fellow's afraid of *us*. We must get down there and make him comprehend that we're not after his scalp, but his boat, and that as soon as the rain stops he must take us to some spot where we can reach civilization. Here, wait a minute. I know how to work it."

Taking a fresh clutch on the ledge above him with his left hand, Deane thrust his right into his pocket and drew out a handful of silver, which he jingled temptingly in sight of the Indian, at the same time motioning towards the boat.

The savage at once lowered his gun, while a grim sort of grin overspread his repulsive looking face.

"There, I told you I understood modern redskin nature," exclaimed Deane, triumphantly. "Go on, Eastman."

Breck was not so sure that his companion was altogether right in his diagnosis of the case, but he was not the sort of fellow to lay himself open to the charge of fear, even with a stalwart, six-foot Indian, armed with a Winchester, confronting him. So he continued the descent, which had now grown comparatively simple, and a few more steps brought him to the hollow in the rock where the canoe was drawn up.

Deane followed close behind him, and a relief indeed it was to be out of range of the pelting storm, which, having held up for a few minutes, had now set in again with redoubled fury. Indeed, so grateful was the shelter that for an instant the other occupant of it was forgotten, while the boys shook themselves, somewhat in the fashion of Newfoundland dogs, and taking off their coats wrung the water out of them by the pailful, as it seemed.

The redskin, meanwhile, stood stock still by the head of the canoe, holding his gun, muzzle down, beside him, while he watched every movement of the newcomers with the closest attention.

Finally Deane, having dried himself as well as circumstances would permit, left his coat spread out on the rock, and stepping over to the Indian, said slowly and distinctly:

"You understand English, don't you? Where do

you come from, and how far is it to the nearest town?"

But the Indian shook his head and muttered some gibberish out of which neither of the boys could make the least sense.

"Bother you for a blundering idiot in these enlightened days!" exclaimed Deane; then turning to Breck, he added:

"What do you think we had better do?"

"Well, I see nothing for it but to wait here as patiently as we can till he takes his leave and then to make him understand by signs or any way we can that we want to go with him. But his not knowing English is a bad sign, I am afraid."

"How? What do you mean?" asked Deane, quickly.

"Why, it looks as if he belonged to one of the real savage tribes, and didn't have anything to do with the Whites. He may go from here direct to some camp where they don't hold any communication with civilization, so we shall be as badly off as ever."

"Nonsense!" exclaimed Deane. "I guess you've read too many old-time Indian stories, Eastman. The reds have too wholesome a dread of Uncle Sam's soldiers to try on any of that funny business nowadays."

"Well, I hope you're right," rejoined Breck.

"Of course I'm right, and I count it the luckiest thing that has happened to us since the Starling ran away—our falling in with this 'Lo, the poor Indian,' that you seem so afraid of."

Of course the last sentence cut into Breck's pride. What boy likes to be accused of standing in terror of anything?

Therefore it cost him something of an effort to keep back the angry retort that rose to his lips and say quietly instead:

"I'm only trying to be prudent."

During all this conversation the Indian had never once taken his eyes off the boys, and now, when they sat down on the rocky floor out of his range of vision, he turned around so as to keep them in view.

The storm continued with ever increasing violence till early in the afternoon, when a rift suddenly appeared in the clouds and it began to clear. Instantly the red man stepped to the side of the canoe and motioned for Breck and Deane to get in.

"There, what did I tell you!" exclaimed the latter triumphantly. "He's doing for us just what we want. Oh, we'll soon be in civilization now, and who'd have thought it would be a redskin that would get us out of the scrape? Won't it make a taking

heading for the newspaper account of our rescue: 'Saved by a Savage'?"

Deane was so excited that he found it hard work to sit still, and had to be reminded to do so by several gruff growls from their copper colored boatman.

Breck, too, was strangely wrought up as the apparently frail little craft, with its heavy load, was shoved out into the rapidly flowing current.

"What if he can't paddle us against it?" he thought. "We may be carried down and dashed to pieces among the rapids. Or no, before he would let that happen, I dare say he would pitch Bell and me both overboard."

Either prospect was sufficiently disquieting, and Breck was not a little relieved when he noted that in response to the persistent paddling of the Indian the canoe began to move up stream in the direction of Queen Junction.

But the movement was a very slow one, almost a creep, and Breck noticed that Deane was strangely silent, while he watched the water rush past either side of the little boat with something very like apprehension in his gaze.

On and on they crept, with rocky heights still on either side of the stream, but to the left they were growing perceptibly lower.

"I wonder how far he is going to take us," observed Deane, after looking at his watch and seeing that it was almost three o'clock.

Breck did not reply. He was absorbed in the train of thought started by the fact of his seeing the red man dart a quick covetous look at Deane's timepiece—a handsome gold one given him by his uncle on his last birthday. For in order to trim the canoe properly, Bell had been signed to take his place in the bow, so that he was in full view of the boatman, who of course paddled facing forward. Thus when the passengers wished to communicate with one another they were obliged to talk over the Indian's shoulder.

Another period of silence ensued, and still the journey up the wild river continued. No sign of man or man's habitation appeared on either bank, although both boys kept up a vigilant watch for such. They had eaten the lunch they had brought long since, sharing it with the red man, who received what they offered with a series of grunts which might mean either thanks for the offer or disgust at the quality of the repast, they did not know which.

By this time the sun had come out and shone down upon the canoe with scorching heat. Wet clothes were quickly dried and soon Deane was wishing for another shower.

"They say drowning is an easier death than being burned alive," he remarked, grimly.

"Look!" exclaimed Breck. "He's going to land here."

And instantly both boys forgot all about the heat and gazed eagerly at the left shore, toward which the canoe was now headed.

CHAPTER XIX.

CAPTIVITY.

At this point, the river being broader, the current was not so strong, so that once headed for a point on the bank, the canoe kept its prow in that direction with scarcely any falling off. But it was in vain that the boys scanned the spot and its immediate vicinity in search of that which had led their boatman to select it as a landing place.

"Perhaps, though, it's a short cut to Queen's Junction," Deane suggested.

"It may be," returned Breck, but in a tone which meant "Very unlikely."

But now the canoe's prow ran up on the shore, and Breck sprang out, glad to be able to stretch his limbs again. There was also a delicious sense of freedom in the thought that at last he stood, to all appearances, on land that was in direct connection

with that civilization from which the Starling's party had been so strangely cut off.

And yet, all about was wild forest land with no sign of man's habitation anywhere to be seen.

"Which way, I wonder!" observed Deane, when he had stepped out of the little craft and taken up his stand beside Breck.

He was not long kept in ignorance. Attracting the attention of both his passengers by a not particularly gentle poke in the ribs, the Indian pointed to the canoe and indicated by an unmistakable gesture that he wished them to draw it further up on the shore.

Breck comprehended at once, and seeing that Deane was puzzled, took it upon himself to explain matters to his companion.

"Not if I know myself," broke forth young Bell, instantly he realized what was required of him, and he folded his arms and threw back his head in a lordly fashion. "The idea of his expecting to make lackeys of us in that way! I'd ask him who were his servants last year if I thought he'd understand me."

But there was no need of speech to make the red man comprehend the reception accorded to his wishes by the shorter of the two boys. That folding of the arms was unmistakable.

The Indian gave a single short grunt, then lowered his gun, which he had taken from the boat with him, from a perpendicular to a horizontal position, with the muzzle pointing straight at young Bell's breast.

The swift change of expression on Deane's face from arrogant defiance to miserable terror would have been ludicrous to Breck had not he himself been in equally bad case.

"Quick, Eastman, take hold and do whatever he wants or he'll shoot us like squirrels," and as he spoke, Deane, bent over and began hauling away at the canoe with all his might.

Breck could do no less than assist him, telling himself meantime that this was what he had been expecting all along; that he had not liked the expression of the Indian's face from the first.

Under the manipulation of two pairs of arms, the canoe, which was luckily a light one, was soon clear of the water, and then the boys straightened themselves up and looked at their copper-colored companion as if expecting a grunt, at least, of thanks.

But in place of this they beheld a further series of gestures which at last Breck was fain to interpret as a command for them each to take an end of the canoe and carry it wheresoever its owner might indicate. Deane was by this time so far overcome by terror that he never thought of protesting when the

order was made plain to him, and in less than three minutes, the two boys, Breck at the prow, and Deane at the stern, were trudging off with their burden through the woods, in the footsteps of their Indian taskmaster, who every now and then turned around with gun presented, to make sure that they had not given him the slip.

"Oh, dear, why didn't we stay aboard the Starling!" Deane presently found courage to open his mouth to mutter. "We're going to be scalped as sure as fate."

Breck was strongly tempted to remind his companion of what he had said relative to present day Indians being quite harmless, but forebore, and tried to manufacture a bright side to the situation by replying: "If there is going to be any scalping done there was no reason why it shouldn't have been attended to when we were under that overhanging rock."

"Then do you believe that if we were to drop this old canoe and take to our heels, that copper-faced rascal wouldn't really shoot us?"

"Well, I shouldn't like to take on myself the responsibility of advising a trial of the plan."

"What do you think is going to be done with us then? I hadn't the remotest idea that in these days of military posts and Indian agents, the redskins

would carry off white men in broad daylight like this."

"We're not men, though, but boys; then this fellow is not actually carrying us off, but we are carrying something belonging to him. And——"

"I don't see how you can joke *now*," broke in Deane, and Breck, his laudable desire to brighten the outlook for his companion nipped in the bud, relapsed into silence.

On and on filed this short procession, the Indian in advance, wheeling on his heel every two minutes to make sure that he was followed. Had there been a regular beaten path, he would no doubt have compelled the boys to go ahead and thus have saved himself the trouble of turning about so frequently; but the route was quite unmarked, and although not particularly difficult to traverse, afforded no sign of leading to any particular point.

At last, after some twenty minutes, Deane complained of giving out.

"I am about ready to drop," he called to Breck. "Let's set down and rest. Do you suppose he'll mind?"

"We'll soon find that out," was Breck's sententious response, and dropping his end of the canoe, he proceeded to seat himself thereon, Deane following suit in his turn.

The Indian did not turn around for about a minute after this, and Deane, gaining courage by the increasing space that separated them from their captor, was about to propose flight, when the hideous face suddenly leered back at them, and then its owner came up at a dog trot.

Deane was thoroughly frightened, but needlessly so, for after a swift, keen glance at both boys, the Indian seemed to take in the cause for their hart, and, leaning against a tree himself, waited for about five minutes, at the end of which time he gave an imperative signal to move again.

The boys responded readily, somewhat encouraged by this slight show of consideration. Still, as may be imagined, their situation was by no means an enviable one, even less so, in many respects, than when imprisoned on Power's Folly. For there, they knew the worst, whereas now the future was a mystery that might hold in store for them a horrible fate.

The afternoon was waning and the boys were almost ready for another rest, when suddenly their dusky leader stepped back to walk close beside Breck, indicating by a turn of the hand the direction to take. The next instant they came out into a small clearing in the forest, a smoldering camp fre in the center,

and some half dozen wigwams forming a circle around it.

Four or five Indians, who had been seated listlessly smoking, looked up when they heard the crackling of twigs, and instantly the boys' captor was surrounded with a company of questioners, as eager as the stolid nature of the savage will permit him to become.

But all the while the fellow who had brought our friends to this sorry pass was explaining matters, he kept his eyes fixed on the boys and his gun in readiness.

"I wonder if some of them don't understand English!" whispered Deane.

But as not one of them showed in his face even as much intelligence as was manifested in the surly countenance of their captor, Breck considered this a very doubtful possibility.

The conference was soon over, all seeming to agree to some plan proposed by the newcomer, who now turned to the boys and pointed to the dingiest looking of the wigwams.

"He wants us to go in there," said Breck, and as there was nothing to do but obey, they walked meekly over and entered.

The flap in front was at once fastened down, rendering the air inside still more unpleasant than it

originally was, while a sort of grunty cheer emitted by the redskins sent a chill of foreboding through the captives.

Could it be possible that a torturing scene was in preparation, on which the Indians were congratulating themselves in advance?

CHAPTER XX.

FRIEND OR FOE.

"EASTMAN, can't you possibly think of some way of escape? They're going to torture us, I know they are. And I am not fit to die."

Deane was fairly groveling on the ground in his terror.

"Hush—don't speak so loud," cautioned Breck, "or they'll hear you, and know that they are triumphing in their plans."

"What plans? What are they keeping us here for, anyway, unless for the fun of tying us to the stake and seeing us squirm when the flames shoot up around us. O-o-h!" and Deane buried his face in his hands and blubbered like a child.

"Don't take on so, Bell," Breck bent over him to whisper. "It won't do any good; it will only weaken you to make use of any chance to escape that may present itself. I haven't the slightest idea that these fellows mean either to scalp or torture us."

"Then what are they keeping us here for?"

"Very likely for ransom."

"But how can they expect a ransom if they don't give us a chance to tell them who and where our friends are?"

"Listen. My theory is this: our putting ourselves in the power of that rascal with the canoe was too great a temptation for him to resist, so he determined to take advantage of the windfall, and brought us here to camp for safe keeping. But as none of his company know enough English to make the negotiations with us, some one is to be sent to another tribe for an interpreter."

"But to whom shall we refer them when they come? That paper said Uncle Archibald has gone to Europe, you know, and——"

"Why, don't you see this will give us just the opportunity we've been wishing for? I would suggest that we write a letter to the editor of the Queen Junction *Journal*, telling the whole story, about the Starling's strange adventure, and all, and don't you suppose he'd be glad to pay a pretty big sum for the opportunity it will afford him of being the first to give the country the news that the lost private car has been found?"

"Yes, but how will he know that the note is genuine?"

"He can prove it easily enough by going up to Power's Folly, looking across the river, and exchanging signals with our friends in the Starling."

"That does sound reasonable, Eastman. You are certainly a wonderful fellow for looking on the bright side of things."

Now that Deane's fears for the future had been in a measure removed, he had time to devote himself to lamentations over the discomforts of the present. He was hungry, tired, and sleepy, but, as he declared to Breck: "I won't dare eat any food they may bring us, for fear it is poisoned; there's no bed, and not even a blanket to lie down on; and even if there was I'd be afraid to go to sleep, because they might change their minds about holding us for ransom and tomahawk me while I was dreaming about losing my scalp."

But, notwithstanding these assertions, Breck noticed that when in the course of half an hour a platter of savory smelling antelope meat was handed in at one side of the flap, Deane soon overcame his qualms about eating, even though he was obliged to transfer the pieces to his mouth with his pen knife, as no forks had been provided.

"Come to think," he explained, apologetically, "if they want to make money off a ransom, they ought

to return us in as good condition as they found us, so it wouldn' pay them to o any poisoning.

And now the worst evil that troubled our friends, their minds having been easier regarding their ultimate fate, was the heaviness of time hanging on their hands. There was absolutely nothing for them to do but sit there on the bare ground and talk ; and as they had had an opportunity of doing this for the past three hours, the occupation had grown rather monotonous.

It was too dark to permit them to examine any of the contents of the wigwam, and with the advance of the night even the dancing shadows thrown on the flap by the fire outside had vanished. The harsh murmur of savage voices, too, had died away, and all was still save for the mournful sighing among the tree-tops of a breeze that had sprung up with the going down of the sun.

No one had come near the captives since their supper had been handed in to them, although the shadows to be seen constantly passing back and forth told them that they were closely guarded. But now, just when both boys were beginning to feel the irresistible approach of the slumber god, the entrance flap was suddenly thrown back and two redskins entered, one of them being the man who had brought the boys to their present sorry pass.

"He's brought the interpreter, I suppose," thought Breck, but at that instant he was seized from behind, his arms lashed securely to his sides and his feet tied together.

Deane, in spite of his vociferous protests, was served in the same way. The whole thing was accomplished inside of two minutes, and without even a grunt from the dusky jailers, who retired as suddenly as they had appeared.

"What do you say to this, Eastman? What has become of all your fine theory about holding us for ransom? Ugh, there's a fly on my forehead, and no way of knocking him off except to roll over and beat my head against the ground."

The boys were indeed in a very uncomfortable, not to say painful position. They could not move unless they chose to lie down and roll along the floor, concerning the cleanliness of which they had grave doubts.

"Can't we get at one another's pockets in some way and get our knives?" suggested Deane. "These cords are cutting into my flesh terribly."

But although each tried what he could do with his teeth, it was without avail, and at last, utterly exhausted by their efforts, they sank back on the earthy floor, while the gloom of utter despair again descended upon Deane, while even Breck felt that their

situation was more alarming than at any time since leaving the Starling that morning.

How long ago that seemed! And how pleasant to be back there now, with kindly faces about them, and a luxurious home on wheels for a shelter!

The minutes passed, and at last utter weariness was bringing sleep with it in spite of the constrained positions, when Breck, who was lying with his back to the front of the wigwam, noticed that some change was taking place at the rear.

It was too dark for him to tell what it was, and there was absolutely no sound given forth, but that something was going on there he had not a particle of doubt. He was going to call Deane's attention to the mystery, but he knew that to do so would only be to increase the terror from which the fellow was already suffering; besides, his heavy breathing betokened that for a time at least he was blissfully unconscious of the perils by which he was surrounded, unless, as was more than probable, they were intruding themselves upon him in the shape of dreams.

So Breck lay there without moving a muscle, his eyes fixed on the opposite end of the wigwam. What he had seen was something that flashed; twice again he caught sight of it, and then he felt that there was some one beside himself and Deane in the tent.

Was it friend or foe? If foe, why should he make his entrance in this stealthy fashion, and yet, who could there be that would prove a friend to them?

"Hist, white man!"

The sound was low, almost imperceptible, but Breck took courage from the English in which it was couched, and in tones equally low replied:

"Yes, what do you want, and who are you?"

"Brown Elk. Save you. No noise. Cut cords."

At the same instant as the response was heard, Breck felt a cold hand on his face and shivered in spite of himself.

But the fingers of the stranger immediately transferred themselves to his shoulders and then felt down till they came to the thongs that bound the arms, which were cut in a trice, and then the exploring tour continued in the darkness till the ankles were reached, when the same kind service was performed for them.

"Now other boy."

And Breck realized that the most difficult part of this unknown friend's duty lay before him.

CHAPTER XXI.

FROM THE FRYING PAN INTO THE FIRE.

Breck had heard or read somewhere that a sleeper can be quietly awakened by simply placing the hand on his forehead. This he now proceeded to do with Deane, although in the intense darkness that prevailed it was a matter of no little difficulty for him to find that portion of his companion's anatomy.

When at last he succeeded in doing this, he bent over till his hair almost swept the cheek of the sleeping boy, ready to whisper in his ear the instant he stirred. This Deane did as soon as the hand was placed on his brow, and Breck put his whole soul into the low injunction :

"Don't cry out. We are to be saved. There is an Indian who is friendly in the tent. Keep hold of and follow me."

It was only by a great effort that Deane repressed an exclamation of mingled joy and astonishment on hearing these words. But no time was given for

wonderment over what had taken place. Action was demanded, for already their midnight visitor had placed his fingers around Breck's wrist and gently drawn him after him.

Luckily it was the height of summer, so there were no fallen leaves on the ground to give the alarm by rustling when trodden upon, so that within ten minutes from the time young Eastman had first become aware of the fact that a third person was in the wigwam, they were all three at a safe distance from the Indian encampment. The escape was made through an aperture in the rear of the tent, which had been slit with a tomahawk.

"Who are you, and where are you taking us?" Deane finally ventured to inquire of their guide, who had now put himself between the boys, holding a hand of each.

"Me friend. Brown Elk. Save scalp poor white boy," was the reply, still in a guarded undertone.

"But whereabouts are we going?" Deane persisted. "To Queen Junction?"

"Yes, yes," assented Brown Elk, in the tone of one who will say "yes" to anything for peace's sake.

"What do you suppose this means, Eastman?" went on Deane, turning to Breck. "What have we done to make this man our friend? I wish it was

light enough for me to get a look at him. I wonder if he belongs to the tribe that captured us? Why does he hang on to us that way? Why doesn't he let us go our own way, now he's set us free? I'm going to try and pull my hand away. I don't fancy being dragged along this way, as if I was a child, if the man that does it did do something that has kept the scalp on my head."

But Deane's effort to draw his hand from that of his conductor met with a most determined resistance, as Brown Elk admonished him:

"Me know where go. White boy no. Hold me; then all right."

"Let's tell him about the Starling," was young Bell's next proposition. "Don't you suppose he would understand?"

"You might try," answered Breck, who had been very thoughtful for the last few minutes.

Thereupon Deane began: "We are from a railroad car that——"

"Hist!" cautioned Brown Elk, and the next instant he broke into a run, dragging the boys along with him at the risk of bringing them into forcible collision with tree trunks and underbrush.

"Hold on here!" cried Deane. "I can't stand this."

But something happened just then which made him

as eager as Brown Elk to hasten his steps. This was the report of a gun immediately behind them.

"Quick, the canoe!" whispered the Indian, and all three plunged ahead, and the next second emerged on the shore of the river.

A canoe was drawn up on the beach, and their rescuer motioned for the boys to step in, which, as may be imagined, they lost no time in doing. Brown Elk was on the point of following them, when another shot woke the echoes of the night, and the Indian fell forward, face downward in the canoe.

"Off, off, in the river!" he gasped out, and then seemed to faint away.

"Don't speak," Breck commanded Deane, snatching up a paddle, and beginning to shove against the sand with all his might. "See, it is almost daylight and if we're not quick, they'll see which way we've gone."

The canoe yielded to his efforts, and the next instant was drifting rapidly down stream with the current. And not an instant too soon. Scarcely had it cleared the beach than the latter seemed, from the sounds, to swarm with a throng of shouting savages, and more than one shot was fired into the darkness.

"Lie flat down in the boat," whispered Breck, himself setting the example, and for five minutes or more

the canoe drifted rapidly onward, with its freight of human lives all huddled in a heap below the gunwale.

Breck ventured two or three times to put his hand over the side farthest from the shore they had left, to get water to sprinkle in the face of Brown Elk, who presently revived sufficiently to tell where he had been hit.

"Shoulder, here," he murmured. "Not very bad."

"Quick, let me have your handkerchief, Bell, till I tie it with mine and make a bandage to stop the bleeding."

Dawn was already beginning to streak the east, and by its light Breck was enabled to bind up the Indian's wound.

"Why, see!" exclaimed Deane. "How fast we must go! There are no signs of those redskins anywhere."

Brown Elk roused up at this, gave one look about him, and then cried excitedly: "Paddle, paddle!"

Deane snatched up the blade, put one end of it overboard, and then gave a cry of dismay. The current was so much swifter than he had anticipated that the implement had been swept right out of his hand.

When the Indian realized what had happened he frowned heavily and opened his eyes as if to severely

reprimand the white boy, but at once closed them again and fell back in the bottom of the canoe with a gasp of pain.

"Oh, Eastman, what shall we do now? How careless of me! We'll—we'll be dashed to pieces on the rocks. Can't you think of some way—any way we can get ashore?"

The situation was indeed perilous in the extreme. As has already been said, the river had an extremely swift current, the canoe was in the center of it, and as Deane only too vividly remembered, rocks, both wholly and partially exposed, were by no means infrequent in its course.

Breck made no reply. He could think of nothing they could do. There was not a single movable thing in the canoe except themselves, not even a seat that might be wrenched from its fastenings, and made to serve as a paddle.

Faster and fairer broke the dawn. Masses of clouds in the east became golden-tipped, and on either bank the birds broke into carols of welcome to the new born day. And swifter on to its destruction rushed the frail craft, sometimes broadside on, and again bow foremost, if a boat that was the same at each end could be said to have any bow. Breck sat in this foremost quarter, his keen eyes fixed on

the water before them, his handsome brows knit in terribly earnest thought.

Immediately behind him crouched Deane, a look of ineffable terror imprinted on his face. He clutched Breck almost fiercely around the waist and ever and anon muttered: "Ah, this is terrible—the worst of all," and then begged imploringly: "You *will* try to save me, won't you, Eastman? You can swim, and I can't—and—and I'm not fit to drown. If—if I had only thought of times like this when—when I had the chance to do something! You are—are a good fellow, Eastman. Do you think it is too late for me——"

He would get so far, then, as a rock loomed up directly ahead, would bury his face on Breck's shoulder and wait shudderingly for the expected crash.

But when the canoe was almost up to the obstruction, an eddy in the current would carry it around to one side or the other, and once more it would dart swiftly onward.

Behind Deane, and lying at full length in the bottom of the boat, was the Indian. Breck's efforts had succeeded in stopping the flow of blood from his wound, but he seemed to be in a sort of stupor, and only now and then took note of his surroundings.

Once he murmured "water," and stepping back.

Breck dipped his cap into the stream, and taking it quickly, pressed it over the redskin's mouth. He opened his eyes for an instant, and something like a look of gratitude overspread his face. Then he relapsed once more into insensibility.

CHAPTER XXII.

THE WRECKING OF THE CANOE.

"LOOK, Eastman!" suddenly exclaimed Deane. "Isn't that the place where we first met the Indian who carried us off?"

"Of course it is," answered Breck, quietly. "I knew we must soon pass it."

"Then—then," went on Deane, excitedly, "we will soon be whirled past Power's Folly—or no, not whirled past, but crushed to death among the rocks there, under the very eyes of our friends. Don't you remember how full of rocks the stream is just there? And there are the ruins of the bridge besides. See, there's the end of the plateau now, with the old hotel, and look there's the Starling! Dear old car, if I could only get aboard of you once more, I'd feel perfectly happy."

It was too early in the morning for any of the party to be stirring, and undoubtedly it was better so,

for fearful indeed would it be for them to behold the wrecking of the canoe.

But could it be possible that this fearful fate was in store for the boys? Breck asked himself this question as he sat there, holding on to the sides of the speeding boat, his eyes fixed on that handsome car, looking odd enough perched up there, by itself on that rocky islet. All seemed so peaceful, the calm blue sky, the freshness of the early summer morning, the songs of the birds, mingled with the rush of the waters. Ah, that last, though in spite of its musical rhythm blending with the other sounds of nature, was as the serpent in this garden of Eden.

"Would they all be killed?" Breck wondered. "Or would some escape, horribly wounded, and which would it be?"

But there was scarcely time for thought or preparation of any kind. Faster and faster the little boat flew on. Already they were so close under the plateau that the car was hidden from sight and they saw nothing but the frowning walls of the island formation and the steps cut into them, at the foot of which Breck had found the Queen Junction paper that memorable morning.

Ah, how horrified he was then, and yet how happy he ought to have been!

But what did this mean? The canoe was cer-

tainly slowing up, and presently began to turn around. Yes, it was, it must be that it was caught in the same side eddy that had brought the newspaper so close to the rocks that day. What if the same thing should happen now and they all be landed safely at the foot of the rocky staircase!

Breck spoke a reassuring word to Deane (who had almost entirely lost consciousness of what was going on through excess of terror) and then leaned out over the canoe as far as he dared, with hand outstretched, ready to grasp at anything that came within his reach. But although the deflecting current carried the little boat tantalizingly close to the rocks, it was not near enough to be of any service.

"What if we threw ourselves overboard?" suggested Deane.

"Too deep and the current too strong," replied Breck, as the little craft began to gather fresh headway.

The disappointment was hard to bear. A look of utter despair appeared for an instant even on Breck's face. Only for an instant, though, for it was immediately chased away by a gleam of hope.

"Bell," he said, "will you try something with me that may save us yet? Quick, there isn't an instant to lose. Drop over that side of the canoe into the water at the moment I do the same on this. Hang on to the

gunwale, and perhaps we can act as a drag that will keep us from striking so hard. And keep near the stern, so that the bow will run up on the rock and make a refuge for us when the stern is broken. And see if you can help me with Brown Elk when the crash comes. We must do all we can for him."

These directions were given in much less time than it takes to read them, and now both boys, with all their clothes on, were up to their shoulders in the water.

The canoe quickly gathered headway again, but seemed to the boys not to rush along quite so swiftly as it had before.

"Do you think you can hold on for a few seconds longer, Bell?" Breck called out across the gunwales. "The end, for better or worse, must come soon."

"Yes," was the faint response.

Deane's face was as white as the water that broke against the rocks just ahead of them, and Breck feared each instant to see him release his hold and sink to the bottom. Another half minute, and then there was an ominous sound of scraping, and the next second, the jagged, needle-like point of a rock protruded through the bottom of the canoe, only an inch or two from the spot where the Indian lay.

The stern immediately sank till the gunwale was

on a level with the water, and poor Brown Elk started up with a look of terror in his eyes.

"We'll try to sa e you," Breck called to him reassuringly; then to Deane he added: "Draw yourself a little further up as I have done, and you can touch bottom. See, we have struck on a rock that slopes this way. Ther is room on that dry part for all three of us. Get up as far as you can and then take Brown Elk's feet vhile I raise his shoulders."

Deane demurred at first, being only intent on saving himself, now that he saw an opportunity of doing so, and by the time Breck had finished his directions, had scrambled forward and was perched atop of the black rock that thrust its head out of the rushing waters with somewhat the appearance of a soldier's cap.

The rear half of the canoe was now completely broken away, and the Indian was being sustained in the arms of Breck, or rather by one arm, for with the other he was beating the water, trying vainly to get closer to the rock where he might obtain a foothold.

"Bell, come help us. I can't hold on a second longer," he called imploringly; and then, very gingerly, Deane crept down to the edge of the rock where it ran out under the water, and reaching out,

took hold of Brown Elk's feet and drew them toward him.

A second later and all three were on the dry portion of the barrier against which the canoe had brought up. But both Breck and Brown Elk were pretty thoroughly overcome.

"What shall I do? Oh, what shall I do?" wailed Deane, sinking on his knees between the two prostrate forms.

"Here, get hold of my hands and rub them briskly," Breck managed to find voice enough to say.

Deane did as directed, and this started the circulation, so that Breck was soon enabled to get to work on the Indian, who, what with his wound and the shock of being thrown into the water, was pretty nearly gone. But he came to after a while, and then the boys were able to look around them and take note of just how well or badly off they were.

The rock upon which they were cast was about six feet in circumference, and lay well out in the stream, but towards the Power's Folly side, from which it was separated by a channel that flowed with exceeding swiftness straight down upon a series of rapids just below. On the other side there was quite a wide stretch of water and then more rocks, while everywhere, except immediately behind the ledge on which the party had been fortunate enough to strike,

the current rushed along with incredible swiftness. The three were to all intents and purposes as truly isolated as was Robinson Crusoe on his desert isle, and with none of the advantages he enjoyed of having a wreck to draw supplies from and a haven of refuge that possessed soil and space enough in which to walk about.

"How are we going to get away?" queried Deane presently, gazing mournfully down at the few fragments of the canoe that still stuck above the surface.

"For my part," responded Breck, "I'm so grateful that we are in the land of the living, that I haven't given a thought to what may come next."

"But we've got to," persisted Deane. "I'm as hungry as a bear for my breakfast. It must be eight o'clock by this time," and he took out his watch to consult it, shivering as his hands touched his still dripping clothes.

Of course the watch had stopped, and then he fell to lamenting the fact that he was not able to dip it in kerosene, which he had read was the only thing to be done when one's chronometer fell in the water. But he soon had something of greater moment than the ruin of his time-piece to occupy his thoughts.

The reaction from the excitement incident to the breaking up of the canoe and the rescue of Breck and

Brown Elk had set in, and the natural result of his lengthy immersion in the water manifested itself in a chill which shook his frame till his teeth chattered.

The hills were so high on either side at this point, that the sun was not yet in a position to send its rays down upon the rock, and with nothing but damp clothes to cover him, poor Deane suffered greatly. So did the others, for that matter, and the worst of it was, that none of them dared think of the future.

CHAPTER XXIII.

AMID THE RAPIDS.

THE boys' watches had stopped at ten minutes past six, but notwithstanding the early hour, they had been through so much since supper the previous evening, that their appetites were as sharp as though it were nine.

"We must be pretty near the Starling, though we can't see it!" remarked Deane presently between his chattering teeth, pointing to some of the timbers of the fallen railroad bridge which protruded from the opposite bank.

"I'm glad of that," returned Breck.

"Glad of what?"

"That we can't see the Starling," rejoined Breck

"Why?" Deane wanted to know.

"Because it would only cause them pain to see us here when they are utterly helpless to do anything for us."

"But they are not helpless," persisted Deane.

"Can't they come to the edge and pitch us down crackers and things of that sort to keep us from starving?"

"I never thought of that," admitted Breck. "Still, see how small this rock is. Do you think they could manage to throw the things so that they would strike just here? You must remember they wouldn't do us any good if they should land anywhere else."

"That boy Willie ought to be able to do it—if only I hadn't shot him in the leg," and poor Deane relapsed once more into teeth-chattering silence, hugging his knees up to his chin in a vain endeavor to get warm.

Brown Elk sat there in stolid muteness, nursing his wounded arm with his well one. Suddenly, however, he spoke, after gazing steadily at Breck for about ten minutes.

"Brown Elk no good," he began. "Bad, bad; white boy good. Brown Elk make white boys think he friend. He no friend them, only to Brown Elk."

"Great Cæsar, Eastman!" broke in Deane. "What does this fellow mean? Can it be possible," lowering his voice, "that he has determined to keep life in himself by strangling us and turning cannibal?"

"Nonsense! How could he do that with only one hand?" returned Breck. "But let him go on. I

have some sort of an idea of what he is driving at. Go on, Brown Elk."

The Indian continued :

"Other Indians send to Brown Elk to talk to white boy, so they get much money for giving them back to friends. Brown Elk promise come in morning, but he come night instead. Want steal away white boys and make money himself. Then white boys save him in water. Brown Elk sorry."

"Oh, that's all right," said Breck heartily, putting one of his white hands on the Indian's brown one.

But Deane muttered : "The mean rascal," under his breath. His was a nature that speedily recovered from the good impulses generated in him by remorse when he saw death staring him in the face. Breck thought of this as he frowned at him for receiving Brown Elk's confession in such a spirit.

"Now everything is clear to me," he added. "I couldn't understand why he should want to set us free when he had never even seen us before. Does your shoulder pain you ? " he added, turning, to the red man again.

"Not much," was the reply, and then the Indian's eyes went back to gaze at the rushing water all around them.

Noting this, Deane took up the question of their situation again.

"Isn't there any way we can get away from here?" he began. "After escaping so much, it would be doubly dreadful to linger along here and die of starvation. I can't believe that we'll come to that. Do you?"

He put the question directly to Breck, who did not answer at once. He seemed to be measuring with his eye the distance from their rocky place of refuge to the top of Power's Folly.

"No, I don't," he suddenly exclaimed, springing to his feet in considerable excitement.

"What is it? What have you discovered?" cried Deane, getting up too, and trying to ascertain, from the direction of the other's gaze, what he meant.

"I haven't *discovered* anything," was the reply, "I've only thought of something that it seems queer didn't occur to me before."

"What's that? Tell me, tell me," and Deane hung on the answer with all the uncontrolled impatience of a child.

"Why the rope by which we descended on the other side. I think it can be made long enough to reach us here."

"Of course it can. We're saved, we're saved!" cried Deane, beginning to caper about on their narrow quarters as though he had taken leave of his senses. The next minute he made a trumpet of his hands

and began to shout with all his strength: "Marie, oh Marie!"

Breck checked him.

"It can't be much more than half-past six," he said, "and they won't be stirring till eight. It will do no good to call now."

It was difficult to restrain Deane's impatience, but he was finally convinced that he could not hasten matters, and settled himself to await the passage of time with all the reasonableness he could muster. However, his excitement produced one good effect; it cured him of the chill that had been the cause of so much discomfort since his immersion in the river.

The sun's rays, too, were beginning to find their way over the hills and warm the rock on which the three castaways were huddled—for the space was so confined that no other word will express the attitudes they were compelled to take in order to retain their places upon it.

Around them the rushing river hurried on its way, here flaring up white and angry as it dashed over hidden rocks, and there looking dark and treacherous, telling of the great depth to which its resistless power had worn a channel in the softer sandstone. There was always in their ears the roar of the rapids, while the spectacle of so much whirling water on every side was almost sufficient to make them dizzy.

Slowly time dragged on, with nothing to mark it but their longing to have it pass; but at length Breck decided that some one at least must be stirring in the Starling, and at a given signal he and Deane broke forth in a united cry of "Help, help, ho, here by the river!"

Then they waited, while two birds flew out from the bank and circled three or four times immediately over them, as if in search of the cause of this unwonted disturbance of their peace.

"There's somebody coming now!" presently announced Deane, catching Breck by the coat sleeve and pulling it excitedly. "See off yonder, up by the hotel; something brown moving along the edge of the bank. It's Estelle! She's heard us and has come out to find what's the matter. We must shout again, quick!"

And shout they did, Brown Elk the while watching them curiously, and to such good purpose did they use their lungs that the wearer of the brown dress immediately began to move towards them, and in less than three minutes there was Estelle, standing on the verge of the cliff immediately above them, wringing her hands and giving other evidences of her belief that they were in danger of immediate destruction.

"Hello there, Estelle!" shouted Deane, "Get

the rope on the other side and throw it down to us."

But for a while the girl gave no sign that she comprehended, but stood there on the edge of the cliff, swaying her body from side to side and every now and then throwing her apron over her head in token of the most utter despair.

"What stupidity!" muttered Deane. "If she don't do something quick we'll starve to death, and then she *will* have something to wail over."

Breck now tried his powers of eloquence at the top of his voice.

"Estelle!" he shouted. "Call Miss Marie."

With a final wringing of the hands, the girl disappeared on the instant, and the party in midstream were left to speculate on just what sort of a report she would be likely to carry back to the Starling, for a good quarter of an hour.

By this time both Deane and Breck were ravenously hungry, and doubtless Brown Elk was in similar condition, but the Indian's impassive countenance gave no sign of his inward emotions. He lay there on the rock, closely attentive to all that went on, but never offering to interfere in any way. And as his glance fell on him, Breck recollected his wounded shoulder and wondered how they would manage about getting him ashore at a rope's end.

"And, for the matter of that," was his next thought,

"how are Bell and I going to use the safety line after we get it? It must descend to us at such an angle that when we put our weight on it, we will swing back and strike the face of the cliff with such force that we must surely be dashed to pieces. And there seems to be absolutely nothing here to which we can anchor it."

Breck looked around him with wrinkled brow, and showed plainly that he saw a "hitch," ahead. Deane was about to ask him about it, when a girl's cry came from the cliff, and there stood Marie, waving her hand to them.

CHAPTER XXIV.

TO THE RESCUE.

"WHAT is the matter? How did you get there?" Marie's clear voice came floating down distinctly to the boys' ears.

"We were wrecked in the canoe," Breck replied, getting up to shout between his hands.

"Bring that rope, won't you?" Deane broke in. "The one we went down with on the other side."

With another wave of the hand, the girl at once disappeared.

"Well, she's a sensible one," commented Deane. "Most of them would have stayed to ask a lot of questions about how it happened, who Brown Elk was, and so on. But I wonder whether we can make any use of the rope after she brings it."

They were not long left in doubt. Within ten minutes Marie reappeared, accompanied by Estelle, who assisted her in transporting the improvised ladder.

Close behind them came her mother, with Mrs. Bell leaning on her arm, and it was one of the strangest sensations of Breck's life to look up at this little group, the faces of which were so familiar to him, and realize that it was an open question whether or not he would ever stand beside them again.

But there was no time for any extended reflections of the sort now. Marie had already gathered up one end of the rope in her hands, and was calling out for instructions.

"Fling it as far as you can toward the centre of the stream up yonder," replied Breck. "The current will then bring it down to us."

"Yes, I understand," was the answer, and drawing back her arm the girl prepared to follow directions.

Breck never forgot what a picture she made, as she stood there on the edge of the cliff in the brilliant morning sunshine, her shoulders squared and her trim figure drawn up to its full height. Estelle and the two ladies stood just behind her, their eyes riveted upon her hands, while, as may be imagined, the gaze of the three prisoners on the rock never once wavered from the spot.

A second of intense suspense, then the line flew out through the air and fell into the water below, and an instant later came floating past the rocky

islet, at least ten feet beyond the reach of the boys.

Not a word was uttered by any one, only Deane's face grew a little paler.

Marie at once hauled in the rope and prepared to make another attempt.

"Try fastening a stone to the end," suggested Breck, at top voice. "A small one."

All four of those on the cliff began at once to search for this needed weight, and presently Marie was seen to tie something to the end of the line. Then she made her second trial.

Breck and Deane both stood ready at the very edge of the rock to snatch the rope when it should be borne past. It left the hands of the fair young pitcher, circled out over the seething flood, and then shot down to the water, a good deal farther out than on the first trial.

But there was a current setting in toward the shore just here, and the precious line began to float in toward the bank, as the current bore it swiftly onward.

Breck did not hesitate.

"Take hold of my hand and lean out as far as you can," he said quickly to Deane. "I'm going to get that rope."

But reach as far out as he might, he soon saw that it would drift by beyond his grasp.

"Quick, hold my foot," he shouted to Deane,

wriggling his hand free, and then he fearlessly flung himself face downward in the current, one hand outstretched, while all that saved him from being swept away in that fierce rush of waters was Bell's clutch on his leg.

But he got the line and was pulled back, sputtering and breathless, by the jubilant Deane, who, now that there was some tangible communication between them and the shore, quite forgot how useless it might turn out to be.

The ladies on the bluff screamed when Breck took his dive into the water, but as soon as he was seen to reappear with the rope in his grasp, Marie applauded vigorously.

"I wonder if that wouldn't be the best way to use it after all," muttered Breck, while he was recovering breath.

"What way?" Deane wanted to know. He had wound the end of the rope about his body, as if he wanted to make as much of it as possible.

"Why, have them fasten the other end securely up there, and then we, in turn, take hold and throw ourselves into the current. The four of them, even if they are all women, ought to be able to pull one of us to shore, and then all that remains to be done is to climb up by the crosspieces as we did the other day."

"But what if the rope breaks while we are in the water?" Deane objected. "There will be a tremendous strain on it."

"We'll have to run that risk, I am afraid," was Breck's grave reply. "There are more serious objections still, you know, against the other plans we have thought of."

"All right," responded Deane slowly. "Who will go first?"

"I think it had better be you," rejoined Breck.

But Deane did not seem to take kindly to this idea.

"Suppose we send him first," he whispered, glancing over his shoulder at Brown Elk, who all this while had been lying quietly in his place in the center of the rock.

"That's just like Deane Bell," Breck could not help but think, "wants to use the Indian to experiment on, and expects me to consider him very self-sacrificing, I dare say, because he gives up first place to him."

But he quickly put such thoughts away from him and replied gravely:

"I'm afraid he won't be able to get ashore at all, at least not unless we rig up something more substantial than a line to send him there on."

"What are we going to do with him then?" Deane asked, quickly.

"I shall stay with him here until he gets a little stronger. But come, are you going to make that attempt to cross?"

"Oh, Eastman, how can I? Just see how the water rushes up, and there are the rapids just below. I know I'm not brave."

"But you are hungry, aren't you?"

"Yes, terribly, and, oh yes, I know what I will do—oh no, I can't, the crosspieces will interfere," and Deane explained that his idea had been to have Marie send down a basket of provisions to them on the line.

"I'll go ashore," he suddenly exclaimed. "I can't stay here and starve. Tell Marie what to do, will you, Eastman?" and while Breck was giving the necessary directions concerning the securing of the other end of the line, Deane set his teeth together, tied a portion of the rope about his waist, and took a firm clutch on the lowermost of the cleats.

"Ready now," called Breck the next minute, and then, without giving himself time to repent of his decision, but with a preliminary shudder, the boy stepped off the rock into the rushing waters.

These instantly caught up his body and whirled it round and round, and then Breck shouted to the women on the cliff:

"Pull, pull."

A strange sight it was truly to see ladies like Mrs. Bell and Mrs. Granville hauling on a rope as though they were contestants in a tug of war trial. But well each one knew that it was a matter of life and death, and excitement appeared to lend them twice their ordinary strength.

The result of this was soon apparent. In a very short time more than half of Deane's body was out of water, and then Breck called out for them to haul in more moderately, fearful lest, in their zeal, they might get the poor fellow entirely clear from the stream, in which case he might swing in against the face of the cliff with fatal results.

Guided by the young stenographer's careful directions, the force was applied to the best advantage, and very soon the welcome announcement was wafted up to them :

"Stop, he's ashore."

Marie then hurried back to the edge of the cliff and arranged a cushion under the rope, so that it would not be cut in two when Deane recovered from his submersion and started on his climb upward.

This was not long delayed, and in another quarter of an hour one of the three who had passed through such perils was safe among his friends on Power's Folly.

CHAPTER XXV.

A MYSTERIOUS DISAPPEARANCE.

DEANE was of course not only pretty well exhausted, but wet and chilled when he reached the top of the plateau, and he was therefore at once hurried off to his room in the car to change his clothes and get something to eat. Marie alone remained on the edge of the cliff.

"When will *you* come?" she called down to Breck.

"I've got to stay with him. He's wounded," and Breck indicated Brown Elk with a gesture.

Before Marie could reply she saw the Indian prop himself on his elbow and touch Breck on the sleeve. What the savage said was this: "You no stay for Brown Elk. You go, then Brown Elk."

"But can you, with your wounded shoulder?"

"Must," was the laconic response, characteristic of the race to which the man belonged.

"All right, then," Breck shouted back to Marie.

"As soon as they are ready, you can send the line out to me."

We will not stop to describe in detail the rescue of Breck and Brown Elk from the midstream rock.

It was a task that occupied the greater part of the remainder of the day, and one accompanied by many moments of intense suspense and periods of terrible anguish, especially to the poor Indian, who was so weak by the time he reached the shore that Breck and Deane had to drag him up over the cliff, hand over hand. The boys then carried him to the car and placed him in the room that had been occupied by the cook and steward.

The addition of the redskin to the party was prolific of not a little discussion, after the two boys had rested from the ordeal through which they had passed, and been refreshed by the best dinner the limited larder of the Starling could afford.

"Aren't you afraid, miss," said Estelle to Marie, "that when he gets well he'll tomahawk us all in our beds?"

"I'm sure I don't see what he would gain by it," was Marie's reply. "He's just as much a prisoner here as we are, and putting us out of the way wouldn't enable him to get away any faster that I can see."

"What are we going to do with that Indian you brought back with you, Deane?" said Mrs. Bell.

"I'm sure that there are enough of us to feed now."

"But what else could we do, Aunt Gertrude? He didn't show fight once, so we couldn't kill him and plead self-defense."

"And I'm sure you wouldn't have had them leave him on that rock to die," put in Mrs. Granville.

"But what are we going to do with him?" Mrs. Bell persisted. "He can't help us any in getting away from this dreadful place, can he?"

"I'm not so sure about that," responded Breck. "He ought certainly to be more familiar with the locality than we are, and may know of some means of crossing the ravine that we have not yet discovered. And that reminds me to inquire how Willie is getting along."

"Splendidly!" answered Marie. "He wanted to run out to-day when he heard you were on the rock, but I told him that he must stay in bed at least a day longer. The wound couldn't have been nearly as serious as we first thought it."

"Then we'll soon be out of this!" exclaimed Deane, adding: "So we'd better appreciate our entirely new and novel exile while we can."

Most certainly, to all outward appearance, the party did not seem to be in desperate straits. It was a beautiful summer night, and they had brought chairs from the saloon and placed them on the rocks

alongside the car where they could catch the soft breeze from the south, and look up at the star spangled sky and around at the towering hills, over the top of one of which the moon was just peeping.

One of the luxuries aboard the Starling was a superb music box. This stood in the dining-room by an open window, just over Mrs. Bell's head, and at her request it had been wound up, so that, while their eyes were feasting on the beauties of this summer evening, their ears were regaled by silvery airs from the favorite operas.

"If I ever get away from here," Breck was thinking, "I am sure I shall often remember this night, if for nothing else than for the change it shows me has come over Bell."

It was certainly true that the fellow's manner had altered decidedly for the better since the perilous adventures through which he had just passed, and perhaps he evinced the fact most strongly in his manner toward Breck himself. It was kindly, even genial; he constantly appealed to Breck for confirmation of assertions he made in giving an account of their experiences, and two or three times made special mention of Breck's hopefulness as contrasted with his own despair.

"Well," soliloquized Breck, "there's nothing like the furnace of affliction to bring out what's in a man—

or a boy. It's turned Deane inside out and showed me his worst side, so I suppose he thinks it's high time he set to work to let me see that he possesses a good one."

However, Breck's thoughts were turned from these reflections, which he hoped were not uncharitable (he was human, you see, if he is the hero of a story, and could not all at once forget the slights he had received at Deane's hands), by a question the subject of them was asking Marie.

"Did you say you thought that small boy would be well enough to start on his expedition to-morrow?"

"I should think so," was the reply, "but I don't know as much about those matters as Breck does I think he'd better look at him and decide for us."

It was "Breck" now, no longer Mr. Eastman, and had been since his rescue from the rock.

"Oh, won't you do it at once, Breckinridge?" petitioned Mrs. Bell. "Never mind if you do have to wake him up. He's a boy, and will go straight off to sleep again, while it will bring slumber so much the more quickly to my eyes it I can close them in the belief that to-morrow will be the last day of this fearful experience."

"Oh, Aunt Gertrude," put in Marie, "why do you speak of it in that way? It seems almost as if—as if we were inviting something still more terrible to

happen. We are all very comfortable, I am sure, with enough to eat and drink, if there isn't much variety to it, and if—if it wasn't for our friends worrying so about us, I'm sure I might say I was having quite a nice time."

"Now you're assured you can put an end to this 'nice time,' I dare say," commented Deane, laughingly.

But "Marie Granville, you shock me, my dear!" exclaimed her aunt, and at that instant Breck—who had gone to fulfill his mission—reappeared on the platform with the query:

"What have you done with him?"

"Done with him? Why, what do you mean?" exclaimed Marie, starting up in her chair.

"Why, I mean Willie," responded Breck, with a smile. "I don't see him where I left him before dinner—in my bed."

"Merciful heavens!" exclaimed Mrs. Bell. "Has the boy disappeared?"

"Don't worry, aunt," rejoined Marie, getting up to join Breck in a search. "He can't get very far."

"I'll wager he's heard us talking about the Indian, and has gone to have a look at him," suggested Deane, as he too rejoined the search expedition which was at once organized.

But there was no second occuhant of Brown Elk's

apartment, where the Indian had fallen into a refreshing sleep, nor was there any sign of the boy to be seen in any other room, although all were thoroughly searched.

"Well, he is certainly not in the car," said Breck, when they had completed an investigation of the butler's pantry.

Marie had called "Willie, Willie!" till she was hoarse, and now she retired to the saloon to rest, while the boys lighted the lantern and went off on a tour of the plateau. They even explored the dismantled hotel, and Breck went all the way to the foot of the steps where he had found the paper that morning, but all without avail.

A search in Breck's stateroom showed that the boy must have dressed himself and put on his hat, but there was no further clue to his whereabouts, and the party retired at a late hour, not only deeply perplexed and very much worried on the little fellow's own account, but with their hopes of soon being set free by means of that youthful messenger flickering and dying out within their breasts.

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE STARLING'S MESSENGER.

BRECK slept but little that night, and when the slumber god did finally condescend to visit him, he brought along such frightful dreams of headlong falls over the edge of the precipice and of dying by inches of starvation that there was not much refreshment in his ministrations. He woke again before dawn and lay tossing in his berth, trying to reason himself into the belief that Willie *must* be somewhere around, when the stillness of the night was suddenly broken by a sneeze.

Breck sprang out of bed as though a cannon had gone off close by his ear. For no one else occupied this end of the car but himself and Willie.

"It must be Willie," he told himself, but where could the boy be? Breck was positive he was not in the room, that is, unless he had slipped in while he (Breck) was asleep.

Hastily getting up, he hurried on his clothes,

caught up Syd's lantern (which was always kept burning in the passage way) and started out to make an investigation. He had just left the rear platform when another sneeze served to guide his steps.

This time there was no mistaking whence it came —from beneath the car.

Stooping down, Breck worked his way under amid the brake chains, steam pipes and braces, and there, lying snugly coiled up on the trucks whereon traveling tramps are wont to perch themselves, lay the missing boy, fast asleep.

"Great Cæsar!" ejaculated Breck. "Whatever could have induced the little chap to scare us all in this curious fashion?"

He then proceeded to waken him.

The boy opened his eyes and then cried out in terror: "Oh, don't, don't take my scalp, please, Mr. Indian!"

"Nonsense, Willie. I'm no Indian. Just take another look." Then, as a sudden thought came to him, Breck added: "Was that what made you leave your nice bed and come down here to hide away and frighten us all—fear of poor, wounded, harmless Brown Elk?"

"Yes, yes, don't give me up to him, will you?" and now the boy, instead of turning away, clung to Breck with desperate tenacity.

"Of course I shan't. He couldn't hurt you if I did, and wouldn't if he could, I'm sure."

But "He would, he would," the small boy insisted, and it was only after promising in the most solemn fashion that Brown Elk should not be suffered to know of his whereabouts, that Breck was able to induce Willie to leave his odd resting place and return with him to their berth above.

"And I want to go off through the tunnel right away the first thing in the morning," the boy added in a whisper, as, with his hand in Breck's, he re-entered the Starling.

"Oh, Miss Marie has been explaining to you about that then?"

"No, but Mrs. Bell has. She said that it was my fault that we came here, and that I must be the one to get them out of the scrape just as soon as I was able to walk."

"But if you are so very much afraid of Indians, are you not troubled about meeting some when you get out of that tunnel?"

"I only *might* meet some there. I *know* there is one here," answered the little fellow ingenuously, as he crept into bed.

"Well, he *is* a queer youngster," soliloquized Breck, "and a pretty smart one, too," and now, the cause of worriment being happily removed, he was

soon sleeping as soundly as the boy by his side.

On account of his wakefulness during the early part of the night, Breck did not open his eyes till an exclamation of astonishment from Deane, close by his bedside, startled him.

The sun was streaming in at the window and young Bell was standing there, gazing, fairly open-mouthed, at the small figure, still slumbering, on the other side of Breck.

"Where on this plateau did he come from?" he asked, and then explained that it was nearly nine o'clock, and Breck not having turned up at breakfast, it was feared that he had followed Willie's example and mysteriously disappeared.

The boy was now awakened, and after being assured that Brown Elk would not leave his bed for that day at least, was induced to accompany Breck out to the dining-room where Deane had preceded them and explained matters.

Mrs. Bell seemed rather pleased than otherwise over the incident, for it had caused Willie to be as eager as she was herself that a start for the outer world should be made as speedily as possible.

"Marie," she said, "you must write a letter explaining our situation at once, while the boys get things ready for letting Willie down over the cliff."

"Oh, Aunt Gertrude," rejoined the girl, "doesn't

it seem dreadful to you to think of that little fellow going down that awful place, and then making his way along the face of those precipices, all by himself?"

"No, my dear," was the prompt response, "it doesn't seem half as dreadful as the idea of all of us remaining here till the last vestige of food is consumed. And, really, I never had so good an appetite as since I have been in this dreadful place, such is the perversity of inanimate things."

Marie felt like inquiring whether her aunt's appetite could rightfully be regarded as an inanimate thing, but wisely concluded to refrain, and at once set about the task assigned her. She wrote out a condensed account of their situation on the handsome note paper Mr. Bell had had made expressly for the tour, placed it in an envelope and then addressed the latter:

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN.

Breck and Deane meanwhile were rigging up the rope by which Willie was to descend.

"I will go with him as far as I can," said the former. "He can't possibly get over those bowlders at the bottom of the ravine unless he has somebody to help him, and besides, I think it is dangerous for him to go over that narrow path by himself. And really,

in any case, I think he ought to wait until to-morrow morning, and start as soon after sunrise as possible."

But neither Mrs. Bell nor Willie himself would hear of any postponement. The latter still stood in mortal terror of Brown Elk, and the former feared that the next day might be rainy. So at eleven o'clock, all being ready, including a bag full of crackers, cheese, a pot of jam, and a box of sardines, the third expedition for relief set out from Power's Folly.

The ladies all kissed and wept over Willie at the last, and were getting the boy so wrought up that Breck cut the parting short by slipping the noose that had been prepared under his arms and lowering him over the cliff.

"Wait at the bottom, Willie," he directed, "till I come down."

Fifteen minutes later the big boy was helping the little one over the great rocks in the ravine, being obliged at times to use the rope he had brought for the purpose. So exhausted was Willie by the processes, that when the beginning of the path on the opposite side was reached, it was found necessary to halt for half an hour while he rested. Then the journey was resumed and the party on Power's Folly watched intently the two figures that made their way

slowly along the face of the frowning wall on which the afternoon sun shone so blazingly.

More than once when they had arrived at that portion of the natural path that overhung the river, the observers saw the taller one let down the cup he had fastened about his waist with a cord, and haul it up full of water, which his young companion eagerly drank. At last, however, they reached the bend already described, and, passing it, were hidden from the watchers' gaze.

Let us accompany them.

"Are we almost there?" asked Willie, when the ticklish passage around the jutting rock had been safely made.

"Yes, almost at the tunnel, and then you can sit down and have another rest."

"You're coming with me as far—as far as you can, you know?" went on the boy, turning to look anxiously up into Breck's face.

"Of course I am, just as far as I can squeeze myself."

Breck spoke cheerfully, but he was not a little worried in mind as he reflected on the wound from which the little fellow had but barely recovered. Willie was a strange boy in every way. At times he was rough in manners, almost uncouth in speech; at others, and indeed mostly, he was refined in both,

and there was nothing about his looks, aside from his dress, to indicate that he was the son of rough people connected with the Tipton mines, which, according to his own statement, was the case.

But it was growing late in the afternoon, and after a short halt at the entrance of the cave, Breck pushed on with his charge, who became greatly interested in the expedition, now that it approached its exciting point.

Luckily the Starling had a good supply of wax matches, so that this passage through the cavern was well lighted and could be quickly made.

Thus it did not seem long before the walls narrowed, the roof and the floor drew near together, and Breck was forced to leave his companion to continue the trip alone. All along he had kept a keen lookout for any branching outlet, but none was visible, and now the moment that young Eastman most dreaded had arrived.

CHAPTER XXVII.

A NARROW ESCAPE.

"WILL you stay here till I get all the way through?" Willie put this question to Breck after the latter had given him a firm pressure of the hand and bidden him good-bye.

"Certainly I will," was the answer. "As soon as you get out of the cave turn around and call back 'All right.' I'll answer you, and that will be the real parting till we meet again when the men you are going to send us set the Starling free. Now don't lose that letter, and take good care of yourself."

Another hand clasp, and then the brave little fellow fell on his hands and knees and began crawling towards the speck of light at the further end of the tunnel-like cavern.

Breck sat there on the stony floor, looking after him with not a little trepidation in his heart, for he had become quite fond of the little fellow, and the

thought that now he was going forth alone into a stretch of country of which nothing was definitely known came home very strongly to him.

Who could tell what experiences might lie in wait for him at the other end of that cavern? It was not at all improbable that the country would prove as wild as Power's Folly itself. Or worse, it might be occupied by a tribe of hostile Indians, and what Willie might expect at their hands, Breck knew only too well from his own recent experience.

Truly, it seemed a cruel thing to do, to send a boy of ten on such an expedition, but there seemed to be no way out of it, no other means by which they could procure release from that imprisoning plateau and put an end to the grief of those dear ones who were now mourning them as dead.

Meantime Willie's legs were striking out sturdily and his form was growing more and more indistinct to Breck's vision. At last he could see nothing more only hear the sound of the shoes kicking against the stone.

Then followed a period of monotonous waiting, which was finally ended by the welcome shout, in the clear, boyish voice: "All right, good-bye" coming through the long passage way as if a ghost had spoken it.

"Good-bye, my boy, good luck to you," Breck

called back, and after waiting an instant on the chance that the boy might have a very last question to ask, young Eastman turned away and began to retrace his steps to the Starling.

But we already know what he is apt to find there, while before Willie Pelton lies an untrodden path, so we think the reader will prefer to company with the small boy for a while.

Sage brush and prairie dog villages! This was the spectacle that greeted the eagerly lifted gaze of the young scout, as we may call him, as he emerged from his narrow quarters, with bruised hands and a great hole worn in the knee of each stocking. No sign of man's habitation or any emblem of civilization was anywhere to be discovered.

Bitterly disappointed though he was, Willie had yet the forethought not to give any hint of this in his final farewell to Breck.

"It can't make it any better for me for them to know," he reasoned to himself, "and it *can* give them a lot to worry over."

He lay down in the warm sunshine to rest after his heavy exertions, and in looking around for a soft spot, noticed what lay behind him—the slope of the exterior of the hill from the bowels of which he had just emerged.

"I don't s'pose it would be any use to climb that,"

he reflected. "It would only take me right back again to where I could see the car."

He ate a few crackers, rested a while longer, and then slinging his lunch satchel across his shoulder, got up and started off across the sandy soil directly away from the hole in the hill.

"I must come to some place some time," he told himself consolingly, and tried to keep up a brave heart.

But it was a hard task, and increased in difficulty in proportion as the heavy walking tired his legs. At first the antics of the prairie dogs who would sit up on their hind legs beside their holes till he was almost up with them and then dive into them with a suddenness that would leave one to suppose they had been jerked out of sight by an invisible wire—for the first half mile watching all this distracted him, and made the toilsome way seem less tiresome, but as he went on and on, and still saw ahead of him the same apparently endless vista of sage brush and prairie dogs, even the latter began to pall upon his vision.

But monotony and bad walking were not the only drawbacks to his peace of mind. The heat was terrible, and Willie's handkerchief was soon as damp as a wash rag from the perspiration he had wiped away with it, while another source of worriment arose from the certainty that the sun that caused his dis-

comfort must presently disappear, leaving him alone and in darkness in that strange stretch of country.

As far back as he could distinctly recollect, he had never been ten miles from Tipton, and although having been brought up in a humble home, he was naturally accustomed to taking care of and waiting on himself, still even such training was not calculated to prepare a boy of ten to face the unknown dangers of a night on the desert, for a desert this vast plain certainly was.

"But I must surely meet somebody before very long," the boy tried to assure himself, and called to mind what Deane had told him about the change the railroads had made in this Western country, dropping towns and villages into the very midst of great prairies like islands breaking up the expanse of the sea.

So he plodded on, turning his head ever from side to side so as to scan with his keen, far seeing eyes the farthest reaches of the horizon in search of a house, barn, a column of smoke, a tree even.

But time passed, the sun sank lower and lower towards the west, and still the same dreary stretch of plain was all that met the boy's eye. Among the contents of his bag was a flask which Breck had taken the precaution to fill with water, and already he had

been compelled to revive himself by several draughts from it.

Resting spells, too, he had been forced to take, but now that the heat was not so great, he was able to get along faster. He had no watch, so of course could only judge of the time by the position of the sun, and it may be added, by the clamoring of his stomach, for it must be remembered that he had had no dinner that day.

The sun at last disappeared, a great ball of fire, seeming to drop through a hole in the earth directly in front of him, and a chill of fear crept over the boy's heart. What would become of him all night, alone on that vast prairie? To be sure he would not have the cold to suffer from, and by so much was better off than men lost in the blizzard the previous winter not far from Tipton, and about whom he had heard his father read. But hunger was a very real foe, and a most unpleasant one to contend with. And what if others besides himself should be hungry? Wolves, for instance.

As this thought presented itself to his mind, the poor boy stopped short in an excess of terror, and for an instant a wild desire to turn around and retrace his steps to the cavern took possession of him. Then he reflected that he would be as likely to encounter danger in traversing all the distance that now lay be-

tween him and the mountain as he would in continuing straight on ; besides, a refuge might be met with at any moment.

So he plucked up as good a spirit as he could, and wearily trudged on again.

It was now quite dark, for the moon did not rise until nearly midnight. Time and again he ran into clumps of sage brush and once he stepped into a prairie dog's hole and nearly sprained his ankle.

He rested for quite a while after this mishap, and was inclined at first to remain where he was for the night, wovels or no wolves. He was dead tired, and very sleepy, but "I'll walk while I count a hundred slowly," he said to himself, "and then I'll have to just stop where I happen to be."

He started on again, counting one to each step he took. But the numbers were very far apart, and the poor little chap could hardly keep his eyes open wide enough to look for the wished for light.

He need not have made the effort, for no welcome gleam came to them, and at last, just as the words "one hundred" passed his lips, he dropped down, a huddled up heap on the sand, his head pillowed on the lunch bag, and one hand clutching his wounded leg as though it hurt him. But he felt it not now, for he was immediately locked in the pain banishing embrace of the slumber god, for in one so young

neither anxiety nor hunger can easily interfere with his blessed ministrations.

Time passed and the still, peaceful night wore on. The stars seemed to twinkle down benignly on the little wanderer, and a gentle southern breeze toyed lovingly with the rumpled locks on his forehead that had strayed out from beneath his cap.

Presently, however, the brooding quiet is broken in upon by the faintest possible whirr, seeming to come out of the very ground beneath the sleeping boy's head. He moves uneasily, but does not wake, and the whirr transforms itself into a rumble. Louder and louder it grows, till the earth itself seems to shake.

And yet the boy sleeps on, although he tosses his arms about, and were it light enough to see, one might perceive that his forehead is twisted into a frown.

Another toss of the arms, and one of the hands strikes something harder than the sand. It is a piece of wood, and the boy wakes with a start. At the same instant with a rush and a roar that is almost deafening, something, dashes past within three feet of his head, and with a thrill of horror, the boy realizes that he has been sleeping almost upon a railroad track.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

WILLIE CREATES A SENSATION.

After Willie had recovered from the shock occasioned by the passage of the train so close to him, he began to realize that his troubles had begun to have an end, if we may so express it.

He had but to stop an engine, show his letter and tell his story, and the rest would follow in short order —his own restoration to his home and the liberation of the party in the Starling.

But how was he to stop the engine? Even should he wait till morning—as he would no doubt be obliged to do before another train came along—would the engineer pay any heed to the signals of a small boy like himself?

But with the subsidence of the excitement aroused by the discovery of the railroad, the boyish desire for sleep reasserted itself, and, deciding to postpone

all questions as to ways and means til' morning, the little fellow was soon locked in repose again, but this time not quite so near the track.

He was awakened by a tremendous blast of steam, and opened his eyes to find a crowd of people around him, the sun pouring down upon his face, and a locomotive "blowing off" within some five feet of his head. A man with a conductor's cap was stooping over and talking to him, but on account of the racket made by the escaping steam, Willie could not hear a word he said.

Seeing the cause of the trouble, the conductor walked over to the cab of the locomotive, bellowed something in the engineer's ear, and then, the noise having ceased, returned to repeat the question to Willie:

"What are you doing here, asleep by the track out on th prairie? Bob, the engineer, thought you were dead, or he would..'t have stopped and lost time; but now, seeing he's done it, be quick about it and give an account of yourself."

"You poor child," here interjected a tall, thin lady, wearing spectacles, a glazed hat, and a blue veil, "have your inhuman parents left you here to perish?"

"No, ma'an.," respon ed Willie, promptly. "Mama and papa don't want to kill me but they think I'm dead."

A murmur of horrified amazement ran through the crowd, and they all pressed closer.

"What are you talking about, young un?" exclaimed the conductor. "How do you know your father and mother think you're dead?"

"Because it was in the paper. There's a lot of us dead."

On hearing this, heads were shaken, and more than one finger tapped its owner's forehead suggestively, while a man in a straw hat and linen duster turned around to those behind him and enlightened them with the announcement:

"Crazy as a loon."

Willie saw the bad impression he had made, and sought to justify himself by presenting the letter Marie Granville had given him. But it was not to be found.

He searched every pocket, but without result, and at last was forced to conclude that it had worked its way out while he was wriggling through the tunnel.

"We can't wait here all day," said the conductor. "We're behind time now. All aboard."

"Oh, conductor!" broke forth several voices in chorus. "You're not going to leave the poor little boy here?"

"But if he lives in the neighborhood I don't want to carry him off and be accused of kidnapping."

"I don't want to be left here," Willie spoke up for himself. "I want to be taken as near Queen Junction as I can get."

"Why, is that where you live?" asked a brakeman.

"No; but the people there know about the Starling, and they've got more locomotives than they have in Tipton."

"Well, he gets me," commented the conductor "but I'll take him along if some of you will be responsible to his folks, or the superintendent of the idiot asylum he's run away from."

"All right, we will," cried several, and therefore Willie was hustled aboard a Pullman car, and everybody hurried to get on the train before it started.

"Are you hungry?" asked a pretty young lady, as she noted the hungry glance that Willie shot at the breakfast-table spread on the other side of the aisle.

"I should say I was," was the unabashed reply; and turning to a young fellow standing by her who was good looking enough to be her brother, the young lady said: "Wallace, tell John to serve breakfast for three this morning, and as quick as he can."

"Good; that means we've captured the sensation

of the day!" exclaimed Wallace, as he hurried off forward.

At this moment the lady in spectacles with the glazed hat stepped up to Willie's fair champion, and said: "Excuse me, but will you let me see the Denver papers I notice you have? Perhaps I can find in them some notice of the institution from which this poor boy has escaped."

"I haven't escaped from any institution," interposed Willie. "I've come from the car, and it's fixed up a great deal prettier than this one is."

"Dear, dear, how dreadful!" murmured the lady with glasses; and taking the papers she dropped into the nearest seat and began to look hastily up and down the long columns of each page.

"Do you reckon he's anyways dangerous?" inquired an oldish gentleman, with a white necktie.

"No, of course he isn't," responded Wallace's sister with considerable asperity. "He looks as sane as anybody in the car. He's just fagged out, that's all, and as soon as he's had something to eat, he'll be able to explain himself satisfactorily, I am sure."

But several shook their heads, and the lady of the blue veil looked quite disappointed because she couldn't find in the Denver papers any record of an idiot boy having escaped from his keepers.

"But I make no doubt," she said, with a consolatory

air, "that there'll be a notice of him in some of the dailies. I'll go back into the other car and see what towns are represented by papers there.

"If I hadn't lost that letter," lamented Willie, "you'd see that it was all right. I'll try to tell you as soon as I get something to eat. I feel—I feel as if there was a great big hole inside of me."

"And here's something to fill it," finished Wallace, returning at that moment, followed by a colored waiter, bearing a tray weighed down with a most appetizing burden.

Willie did not delay from bashfulness about beginning to dispose of the repast set before him, and, as the food he so much needed strengthened his body, he was enabled to bring his mind into such subjection as to tell his wonderful story from the very beginning in a straightforward, connected fashion.

"Jericho grasshoppers!" exclaimed Wallace, as soon as he had named the Starling, "you don't mean to say that you've come from that car that went over the precipice into the river near Queen Junction?'

"Yes, I came from the car," replied Willie, "but it didn't go over any preci—whatever you call it. Oh, yes, I know now what you mean! It was in the paper. I heard them talking about it. But it wasn't true."

"Isn't true?" echoed Wallace, leaning across the

table to look steadily into the eyes of the small boy. But his face was such a good natured one that Willie wasn't frightened. "Where in the name of the seven sleepers has the car been all this time then? If it was a ship I could understand how it got lost but a car—well," and Wallace leaned back again in his chair to stroke his chin with an air of deep perplexity.

"You don't think I've escaped from an idiot asylum too, do you?" queried Willie, stopping a piece of beefsteak on its way to his mouth to put the momentous question.

"Go on with your story, Willie," interrupted Wallace's sister. "I won't let him interrupt you any more."

So the marvelous tale was continued and brought up to the point where the boy had been awakened by the sound of the escaping steam.

Just as he finished, the train stopped at a station, and Wallace started for the door.

"Where did you say Mr. Bell lived?" he stopped half way to ask. "I've forgotten, though I remember reading the name last week."

"I—I don't know; I've forgotten, too. If I only hadn't lost that letter."

"Never mind. I'll wire the news to the New York and Philadelphia papers, and everybody interested will be sure to see it. Do you realize, Mabel, that

our fame is made in connection with the restoring of the dead carload of tourists to life ?"

But just then the train came to a halt, and the youth made a bolt for the telegraph station without waiting for a reply from his sister.

The news meanwhile had spread through the cars, and created the greatest excitement, for everybody had read of the terrible misfortune that it was supposed had overtaken the Starling, and the affair was still fresh in their minds as, it must be remembered, the car had been missing for only ten days.

The lady with the glazed hat and blue veil persisted for quite a while in declaring that there could be no truth in the story because the boy must be an escaped inmate of a feeble-minded institute; but when at last she was convinced she consoled herself for the loss of one gloomy view of the affair by at once taking up another.

"If that bridge is down," she wanted to know, "how are they ever going to get those poor souls off the island without waiting to build another ? And they may starve by then."

CHAPTER XXIX.

A NEW SOURCE OF ALARM.

BRECK took his time about retracing his steps to Power's Folly, and thus it was well on in the afternoon when he again found himself beneath the towering cliffs of that plateau. This time he had taken pains to have the rope long enough to reach clear to the bottom of the ravine and not to the top of a bowlder merely, so now he had merely to put out his hand and touch it.

"Well, this *is* a contrast to the fashion in which I have made my reappearance the other two times," Breck paused to reflect before he began his Jack and the Beanstalk act, as Deane had called it.

Certainly, no scene could have been more peaceful. The caroling of birds, the hum of summer insects, the plunging of the water over the rocks, subdued to a refreshing plashing by distance, all this, coupled with the anticipation of speedy restoration

to civilization and friends through Willie Pelton, caused Breck's heart to beat high with hope, and as he started on his climb upwards he actually began to whistle softly an air from "Clover."

But the whistle came to a sudden termination when he reached the top and noted the fact that the cushion had slipped from under the rope and that the latter was nearly chafed through,

"That *was* a narrow escape," he murmured, softly, as a little shudder went through him, while beads of perspiration, not caused by his exertions in climbing, came out upon his forehead.

"That's because I was congratulating myself before I was out of the woods, I suppose," he soliloquized. "I won't say anything about it to the others though. If all goes well, we shan't need to use the thing again. And now for some lunch."

He strode rapidly off in the direction of the Starling, thinking it rather singular that he did not see any of the party around.

"Perhaps they're playing whist though," he reflected, as he swung himself up on the rear platform.

But the saloon was empty. So also were the dining-room and kitchen; neither did he receive any response to his knocks at the doors of the various bedrooms Indeed these were all partly open, and

Breck could see for himself that they were not occupied.

"This is queer," he reflected. "I never knew them all to go off before. Besides there isn't any place for them to go. Even Estelle is missing. Surely Brown Elk will be here. Perhaps he can manage to tell me what has become of the others."

But the cook and steward's room was also tenantless.

"It's a mystery now, sure enough!" ejaculated Breck. "Where *can* they all have gone to?"

He stepped out on the other platform, and shading his eyes with his hand, swept the whole plateau with a searching gaze. But no trace of living soul could he discover.

"Could a party have arrived and rescued them while I was away?" he asked himself.

But if such had been the case there was no evidence of the fact; besides, he could not believe that they would have gone without leaving some message behind for him, posted in such a conspicuous place that he could not fail to see it.

"The hotel! Perhaps they've all gone there for some reason," he suddenly bethought himself, and at once turned his steps in the direction of the dilapidated Inland Island House.

Everything seemed as usual about this hostelry.

There was the broken down door, just as his own blows with the axe had left it.

"The ladies haven't been through it yet," he reflected. "Perhaps they have induced Deane to take them with him on an exploring expedition. Still, that doesn't explain the absence of Brown Elk."

Entering the wide hallway, from which corridors diverged in two different directions, he stepped to one side and called, "Bell, oh Bell, are you here?"

The only result, however, was a re-echoing of the cry through the deserted passageways, and then Breck walked to the opposite end of the office and repeated his call there. He waited an instant and then was about to turn away with the intention of going outside to see if the party had not gone down the steps behind the hotel when he heard a soft "Hist, there!" down the passageway.

"Hello," he called out, "who's that and where are you?"

"Hush, don't speak so loud," came the reply in Deane's voice. "Come down this way softly, to last door on the left."

Completely mystified Breck tiptoed down the dark corridor till another hissing sound admonished him that he had reached the apartment to which he had been directed. The door was open, on the merest crack, and as he approached, Deane reached out his

arm, almost pulled him inside, and then closed and locked the door.

"Oh, Breck," gasped Mrs. Bell, rushing forward to seize him by the hand, "how thankful I am that you have found us, and have been able to get here in safety! Did you see him, or have any trouble?"

But for the moment Breck could not speak, could do nothing but look around at the frightened faces about him. They were all here, in two connecting rooms, and in one corner was a pile of cracker and preserve boxes, and the water cooler. The room was absolutely bare of all furniture, and the windows so begrimed with dirt that but little light could struggle through.

"What does all this mean?" Breck finally managed to say. "Why have you left the Starling, and what do you mean by seeing 'him'?"

"Oh, of course you don't know about it," broke in Deane, "but Brown Elk has been on the war path. You hadn't been gone more than two hours before he came into the dining-room where we were all at lunch, uttering most frightful cries."

"And I'm sure he had a knife in his hand," added Mrs. Bell, with a shudder. "Oh, it was terrible."

"Yes, he was right behind Marie," went on

Deane, "when all of a sudden he fell forward on his face. And you can believe we didn't waste any time in getting out. Didn't you see anything of him? Were you in the Starling just now?"

"Yes, went all through it, even to the room where the Indian slept, and saw nothing of him."

"Oh, where can he be?" exclaimed Mrs. Bell. "He may be here in the hotel looking for us now. Are you positive, Deane, that he can't get in at the windows?"

"Yes, because these rooms are built right on the edge of the cliff, as I told you. But, tell me, Eastman, how did you come on with Willie? Did he get through all right?"

"Yes, and I hope he's told his story to some one by this time. But do you really think it was necessary to run away from poor Brown Elk in this fashion? I think he must have been ill, out of his head, and it seems cruel to have left him there to suffer perhaps."

"That's just what I say," interposed Marie, now coming forward. "I don't care if they do say he held a knife over my head. I'm sure he wasn't in his right mind when he did it, and I wouldn't have come away if all the others hadn't insisted on it. And of course I wasn't going to stay there alone. But

it is certainly very strange you didn't see anything of him when you were in the car."

"I'll go back now and take another look," rejoined Breck.

"Oh, don't think of it," exclaimed Mrs. Bell. "He may spring at you from behind the first bowlder you pass. Besides he could see where you came from and so find his way here."

"But do you expect to remain here?" asked Breck. "You surely can't be made comfortable, without even a shawl to lie on."

"And if it hadn't been for me," interjected Marie, "we wouldn't even have had anything to eat. But I came out by way of the pantry and got Estelle to collect a few things together before I told her what the matter was."

"But we'd be still more uncomfortable if we had to sleep minus our scalps," interposed Deane. "If you take my advice you'll stay where we are till Willie comes back with his relief force. We've got two rooms here, and we surely won't be obliged to stay over one night."

"Where can that Indian be, though?" said Breck. "That's what puzzles me. I'm not afraid to go out and look myself. Besides, you didn't bring a gun, did you? And there are all the firearms in the car.

ready to his hand to pick up and shoot us if he is so inclined."

"Great Scott!" ejaculated Deane. "That's so. I forgot all about that. Perhaps you'd better see if you couldn't get them for us, Eastman."

"All right, I'll go right away; I'm not afraid."

CHAPTER XXX.

A CONVERSATION OVER THE RAPIDS.

BRECK was about to set out on his return to the car when all in the room were electrified by hearing the report of a rifle.

"Merciful Heavens! He's found the guns and we are lost!" groaned Mrs. Bell, sinking to the floor, in a perfect paroxysm of terror.

Even Marie's face blanched, while Mrs. Granville folded her to her arms and held her tight, as if thus to protect her as long as might be possible.

Deane cowered visibly, but managed partially to cover his own terror by turning fiercely upon Estelle with an admonition to be quiet, for at the sound of the gun the poor girl had uttered a series of shrieks that must certainly have been heard outside.

"You can't, you mustn't think of going now," cried Mrs. Bell, rousing herself to stretch out her hands imploringly to Breck, who had made another movement toward the door.

"But that gun may not have been fired by the Indian," returned Breck. "It sounded to me as if it came from across the river. It may be a party of hunters, and if so, we ought to signal them. There's a chance, you know, that Willie may not be able to do all that we hoped for."

But such was the terror in which not only Mrs. Bell but also Mrs. Granville and Deane stood in respect to the red man on the island, that Breck could not reconcile them to his starting on a tour of investigation until after dark. So he was obliged to possess his soul in such patience as he could, and as an aid to this end seated himself cross-legged on the floor in front of the provision boxes and proceeded to partake of his long delayed lunch.

Marie made a seat out of a cracker box and took up her position by him.

"Isn't this terribly exasperating?" she began. "I don't believe there was a thing the matter with that Indian, except fever induced by his wound that drove him out of his head. And to think that we may be losing the chance of communicating with the outside world by means of those men that are firing! There they go again."

Two more shots in quick succession broke the stillness of the summer afternoon. Mrs. Bell gave indications of going off into a swoon, Estelle shrieked

again, and taking advantage of the confusion Breck sprang to his feet and slipped out of the door before any one could stop him.

Running lightly down the long corridor he dashed out into the cheerful sunshine and was at once electrified by the sight of two men standing on the opposite bank of the river, gazing open-mouthed across the stream at the Starling. They each carried guns, and one was pointing to the car and evidently talking about it to his companion.

"Ahoy there! Where do you come from?"

Making a trumpet of his hands, Breck had rushed to the edge of the bluff and shouted across.

Even from that distance he could see the start the men gave at the sound of his voice, and he noted too that one of them made a movement as if to dodge back among the trees, but the other held him fast.

"Hullo, how did that car get over there?" the bold one called back.

"On the bridge," answered Breck. "It was struck by lightning after she crossed and we have been held prisoners here ever since. Haven't you heard about it?"

"Naw," was the reply, coupled with the addition: "How long have you been there?"

"Over a week, and you are the first ones who

know where we are. Our friends think we are all in the bottom of the river."

"Oh, they do? That's too bad now, ain't it? I s'pose you'd like to get away."

"Of course we would. We've sent out one messenger already, but he's only a boy, and we don't know yet whether he'll be able to get word to our friends or not."

"All right, then; me an' my pard here will give you a good turn—for a consideration. How much'll you give us to let your friends know the fix you're in?"

Breck had already conceived his suspicions of the two seedy-looking strangers; now these were confirmed. They were evidently "shady" characters; perhaps criminals in hiding from the officers of justice.

"The less we have to do with such fellows the better," he said to himself; and, as the shortest way of ending the conference, turned on his heel and started toward the Starling.

"Halt there, or I fire," was the exceedingly unpleasant command that came across the river and brought him to a speedy halt.

"Well, what is it?" he called out, turning around and boldly facing those who had now openly showed their hand.

"We don't stand no foolin'" cried the man who

did all the talking. "It ain't no way to receive our offer of doin' you a service to turn your back on us. How much will you give us if we go off and tell your friends about the fix you're in? There'll be expenses connected with our doin' this little favor for you, an' of course we want to insure ourselves against loss."

"You certainly go about it in a queer fashion," retorted Breck, coolly. He had had the opportunity to consider the situation, and had decided that the man would not dare to shoot, as nothing could be gained by it. "I can't promise you anything. We're not dependent on what you may do for us, anyway. As I have already told you, we have a messenger on the way to Queen Junction now."

"But you told us, too," was the quick rejoinder, "that you were not at all certain that he could do what you wanted done. *An we'll see that he don't do it,*" the man added, significantly. "So you'd better dicker with us if you want to get out of that."

"As I have already told you, I haven't the authority to do any 'dickering,' as you call it, so the quicker you make yourselves scarce the more likely you will be to escape capture by the party I expect here now at any minute."

This speech of Breck's was not without its effect. The belligerently inclined individual threw a nervous

glance over his shoulder, and then sent his companion back into the woods, evidently to do sentinel duty.

Breck took advantage of this momentary diversion of attention to place himself a few steps near the Starling.

"Now, then," resumed the man with the gun, "we've been the first to discover your prediccyment, so it's no more'n right we should profit by it. Come to think, I remember hearin' folks talk 'bout a rich man's private car what was lost somewhere's round these parts. Now if you'll give me your solemn promise that we'll get five hundred dollars for doin' it we'll tramp over to Tipton and let folks know whar ye be."

"But what if the parties to whom our own messenger was sent get here first?" rejoined Breck.

"They won't, though, for I don't believe you sent no messenger. How could you? You say you're caught there and can't get away. Stands to reason if you could you wouldn't a stayed there a week an' more. Come, now, give us your promise for the five hundred."

"I tell you I can promise nothing on my own account," was Breck's reponse. "I'll have to consult with the other members of the party. You'll wait

there till I come back with my report, will you?" and Breck pointed to the car.

"Oh, no fear o' my leavin'," rejoined the man, and dropping the stock of his rifle to the ground, he leaned upon the muzzle and began to fan himself with his hat.

Breck lost no time in repairing to his room in the Startling, picked up the shotgun which stood in one corner of it, and, armed with this "backer" to his arguments, returned to the edge of the bluff, ready to resume the conversation.

CHAPTER XXXI.

THE TRAMPS.

"Now, then, I am ready with my answer," Breck called out, taking up his stand at the edge of the bluff, and tapping the gun significantly.

The man's look of mingled dismay and disgust would have been ludicrous had Breck been close enough to see, and in a mood to appreciate it.

"What do you mean by that?" the fellow demanded; then, deciding evidently that it would be best to affect to disregard the gun, he added: "Am I going to get the five hundred dollars?"

"The best thing for you is to get away from here, and just as quick as you can," retorted Breck, now bringing his weapon to a "present arms" position.

The other's reply was to drop his own gun to the ground, fold his arms with the air of a martyr, and call out across the gulf: "You surely won't shoot at a defenseless man. See, I place myself at your mercy."

"Certainly I won't shoot you now," responded Breck, "and just as certainly I don't intend to let you shoot me as you threatened to do a few moments ago."

"I did wrong," called out the tramp, for he was little better in appearance. "I was crazed by hunger. Me and my pard haven't tasted food since last night. We haven't nothin' but our guns to depend on, and neither me nor him is a good shot."

"And you thought I presented a larger surface to hit than a bird or a squirrel, so you concluded to take a shy at me," interposed Breck, who had let his own gun drop till its stock rested on the ground, but who kept a careful eye on every movement of the enemy.

"Oh, come now, young man," whined the tramp, "don't chaff at the expense of a poor chap what's down on his luck. I ask yer pardon for all my threatenin'. This gun ain't loaded, so ye needn't be afeared. An' now I can do more for you than you can do for me, except to promise me some money I can buy food with for tellin' your friends what has become of you. I'll take a hundred dollars for the job, an' that's a bargain."

"But a bargain is something that it takes two to make," rejoined Breck, "and, as I told you once before, I have no authority to treat with you in this

matter. I'll tell you what to do, though," he added, with sudden inspiration: "send a letter to Mr. Archibald Bell, Crescent, Pennsylvania. Mark it 'Private and Personal,' so that no one else reads it and tries to get ahead of you with the information; in it tell him what you have found out, and leave it to his generosity to reward you for you information. There, my throat's sore with yelling across this stream, and I can't talk to you any more;" and, turning abruptly away, Breck hastened to place the Starling between himself and his doubtful friend on the opposite bank.

He heard the latter call after him several times, and it was plain that the fellow was suspicious of the frankness with which Breck's suggestion had been made, but Eastman paid no attention to the shouts, and using the car as a screen, soon managed to regain the shelter of the hotel.

"That ought to settle matters," he told himself. "Mr. Bell must have heard by this time where we are, so that fraud can have no claim to his bounty. If both fellows are not escaped criminals I'm very much mistaken, and like as not as soon as they show themselves in a town they'll be arrested at once and their story about the Starling utterly discredited. It's queer where that Indian has got to, though."

"Well, who was it? Did you see anything of Brown Elk?"

Deane had stolen cautiously down the corridor, and now locked arms with Breck as he led the way back to the others.

"No, didn't find any trace of him. It's queer, isn't it?"

Breck had not yet made up his mind whether he ought to say anything about his interview with the tramp or not. He found now, however, that he would soon have to come to a decision in regard to the matter.

"Who were you talking to then?" went on Deane. "I heard you shouting away at a great rate and long sentences, but couldn't make out what you said."

"Oh, that was only a tramp on the other side of the river. I had a little adventure with him."

"A tramp, and on the other side of the river!" cried Deane, excitedly. "Of course, you told him how we were fixed here and got him to go for assistance."

"Well, I started to do it," rejoined Breck, "till he threatened to shoot me," and holding Deane outside the door of the apartment where the others were assembled, he told, in a lowered tone, the whole story.

"But why didn't you tell him in the first place that uncle would pay him well for information about us?" Deane wanted to know.

"How could I? I hadn't the authority to do such a thing."

"And you say that he said he'd see that nobody else came to help us if he wasn't allowed to——"

"Here, what is that great secret you two boys are talking over?" interposed Marie, putting her head out of the door at this juncture.

"Shall we tell her?" said Deane, turning to Breck.

"Of course you shall and must," went on the girl. "Come, I'll walk out to the portico with you. I'm not afraid of that poor, wounded Indian, and I am suffocating for a good breath of air and a glimpse of sunshine."

There was nothing for it but for the three to stroll down the corridor while Breck put Marie in possession of the facts which he had just related to Deane. Marie agreed that the course Breck had adopted was the best that could have been taken, but looked grave when she heard of the tramp's threat to prevent any one else from coming to their aid.

"Pooh, what can he do to hinder them?" said Deane, as they reached the large doorway.

"A great deal," replied Marie. "Whoever comes

will probably come by the railroad, and it will be the easiest thing in the world for these men to loosen a rail and throw the car from the track."

This was a view of the case that had not before presented itself to Breck, and he was obliged to admit that, judging from what he had seen of the men, they would not hesitate to carry such a scheme into execution, should it occur to them.

"Do you suppose they have gone off?" asked Marie. "He may have concluded to send a telegram to Mr. Bell after all."

"Do you remember the very last thing he said to you?" added Deane.

"I couldn't catch it all, and I didn't pay very much attention at the time, but now I think it over I believe he did go back to his threatening tone. I'll go to the edge of the bluff and see if I can discover anything of him."

Armed with the gun, which he had all the while been carrying, Breck left the hotel and walked fearlessly to the edge of the cliff. He peered eagerly in among the trees on the other bank, but there was no sign of the tramps.

"Halloo, there!" he called out. There was no response, and after repeating the shout and lingering a few minutes, he retraced his steps to the hotel.

"They've gone," he reported, "and I guess it'll

be all right. And now," he added, "I don't see why you won't all come out of the car and be comfortable. I can certify that the Indian isn't aboard of it."

"Where is he then?" demanded Marie and Deane in a breath.

"There, in my opinion," replied Breck, lowering his voice and pointing to the river. "I can't help but think that his wound brought on a delirium in which he ran to the edge of the bluff and threw himself over."

"Horrible!" and Marie shuddered, while Deane cast a nervous glance over his shoulder.

At that instant a succession of screams broke the summer stillness, and Estelle came rushing towards them, crying out as she ran: "Help, help!"

CHAPTER XXXII.

BROWN ELK AGAIN.

MARIE was the first to succeed in sufficiently calming the maid to enable the latter to tell the cause of her agitation.

"Oh, miss," she said, sinking down pantingly on the steps of the car, "it's that wild Indian. He's in the hotel, and your aunt's fainted dead away, and your ma ain't much better——"

But the three did not wait to hear more. Snatching up the gun, which he had placed temporarily against the side of the Starling, Breck led the way, and within two minutes took in the situation for himself. And a most amazing one it was too, in the sense of being utterly the reverse of what he had expected to see.

Across the doorway of the room where the party had sought refuge, lay Brown Elk, his eyes closed, his chest heaving convulsively, and his head sup-

ported by Mrs. Granville, who was kneeling on the floor for the purpose.

Close beside her was Mrs. Bell, busily engaged in wiping the moisture from the Indian's brow with her handkerchief.

"Oh, Marie," exclaimed Mrs. Granville, as soon as she caught sight of her daughter, "how unjust we have been to this poor fellow! Come here and help me re-bandage his wound, while Dean and Breck support his head. He must have been suffering excruciatingly while we have imagined he was plotting to murder us."

It was all clear now. Brown Elk had undoubtedly been out of his head when he had rushed into the Starling's saloon, had come to himself when left alone, and finding the car deserted, had guessed at the terror he had caused, and determined to take himself off.

"But where has he been all this time?" Deane wanted to know, when Breck had propounded the foregoing as his theory of the case.

"Right here in the hotel, I imagine. There is plenty of room."

"Then we fled from the car to escape him only to land under the same roof after all," said Marie. "But what made Estelle rush out to us with such frantic cries for help, mother? I expected nothing less than to find you and Aunt Gertrude put to the torture."

"Only her own silly fears. We had about made up our minds to venture out after you and return to the car, and had got half way down the corridor when we saw the Indian coming slowly toward us. He had his hand to his head, and moved apparently only with the greatest difficulty. I saw this at once. but before I could restrain her Estelle had gone off shrieking, and Mrs. Bell was just about to follow her example, when we both saw the Indian reel. This banished all fears, and we rushed forward to his assistance. We were able to hold him up till we got as far as the door, when he sank down to his present position. I think he is a very sick man, and ought to be taken back to the room he occupied in the Starling, where he can receive proper treatment."

Breck had a fine opportunity to say "I told you so," but he nobly refrained from doing so, and devoted all his energies to making poor Brown Elk comfortable. Getting Deane to go back to the Starling with him, he contrived to rig up a rude stretcher out of the steward's mattress and some boards from the battered indoor of the hotel; and on this the two bore the Indian to the car and placed him in his old quarters.

He seemed deeply grateful for all that was done for him, and the consciences of the ladies pricked them not a little for their unjust suspicions. Of course they all returned to the comforts afforded by the Starling.

It was by this time well on in the afternoon, and after the excitement over Brown Elk had subsided, Breck and Deane sauntered out to the bluff above the river to see if there were any signs of the rescue party that they hoped Willie would be the means of sending them.

But no one was to be seen, and Deane threw himself down on the warm rocks and kicked spitefully with the toe of his patent leather shoe against the rail that projected out over the cliff.

"And this is what I gave up going to the Adirondacks with that crowd of Philadelphia fellows for," he muttered.

"I don't see what you have to grumble at," returned Breck, taking a seat on the rail and removing his hat to let the breeze blow through his hair. "If you'd gone to the Adirondacks you hoped to have had some adventures worth telling about when you got back, wouldn't you? And I'm sure you couldn't possibly have got hold of a bigger one than you are enjoying at this very minute."

"Enjoying!" echoed Deane, scornfully.

"Yes. Why not? You certainly do not seem to be suffering at the present minute, lying out here among mountains that Easterners travel miles to see, your cheeks fanned by cooling breezes and your ears tickled by the plash of refreshing waters.

"Why, hello, Eastman what's come over you to-day? You are actually verging on the poetical. But I don't care anything about the breezes and the plashings; I'd like to have a little more varied diet then sardines and chipped beef, crackers and cheese. Besides, my summer's fun's all broken up, for you don't suppose Uncle Archibald will feel like continuing the tour after we get out of this scrape? But I say, I wonder what's become of those tramps you were telling about. Hark, what was that?"

Deane sprang to his feet, and motioning for Breck to keep silent, listened. Crack, crack, came the sound of blows on some iron substance, back in the woods on the other side of the river.

"Do you suppose they are coming at last?" went on Deane.

"I hardly think so yet," replied Breck. "I am afraid it means something else—means mischief."

"From those tramps!" exclaimed Deane. "Then you think Marie was right, and that they intend to tamper with the track to keep a rescue party from reaching us."

"I am afraid they are doing it now," answered Breck gravely. "It sounds to me as if somebody was trying to knock a rail out of place."

"But that ought to be stopped," cried Deane.

"If a party comes down to us in the night, there will be a dreadful accident."

"I know it," answered Breck. "But what can we do?"

"Can't you call out to those men and promise them big pay for getting us out of this?" suggested Deane.

"You may try that if you like. As I told you before I haven't the authority to do it. Besides, I don't believe they can hear you at this distance. Great Scott, though, I've just thought of a plan! Run to the Starling, quick, and get your cousin. Her mother too if you like. The more the better. Hurry as quick as you can. You can ask them better than I can or I'd go myself. I'll explain as soon as you get back."

Incited by his curiosity, Deane hurried off, and soon returned with Marie, her mother and Mrs. Bell, all as impatient as himself to learn the nature of Breck's idea.

"Now don't laugh, or think I've taken leave of my senses," began the latter. "When I count three I want you to join me in a cheer, as loud a one as we can raise. There, I knew you'd think it idiotic, but just give me a chance to explain. Those tramps can hear that easier than they could a plain shout, and they'll probably think—at least I hope they will—that our friends have found us out, and that it's no

use for them to try to keep away. I know the idea sounds like a crazy one, but it's the only thing we can do to try and prevent mischief. I hope they'll take themselves off as soon as they imagine some people who may know them are around. What do you say? Shall we try it?"

"Of course we will," cried Marie, enthusiastically; then drawing in her breath, she added with a smile: "Now give the word; I'm all ready."

"Remember, to all shout as loud as you can," rejoined Breck, nd then he began to count.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

HOPE DEFERRED.

"THREE!" counted Breck, and forthwith all five members of the party cried "Hurrah!" with a gusto, that, coupled with the attendant circumstances, caused them to break into uncontrollable laughter.

"I never heard of anything so ridiculous in my life," said Mrs. Granville, wiping away the tears which the excess of mirth had brought to her eyes. "The idea of our cheering with such a will, people in our predicament!"

"Hark!" cautioned Breck. "We want to see if we have frightened them off."

All listened, but there was no sound save the rushing of the water over the rocks below them. And although Deane and Breck remained by the edge of the cliff till nearly sunset, no further noises came from along the line of the railroad, so that they felt that in all probability the ruse had been successful,

provided the mischief had not been already accomplished.

This, however, seemed unlikely, as the blows had continued for so brief a period, not long enough, Breck thought, for any material damage to have been done.

But whatever the result on the other side of the river, certain it was that the cheering had been productive of naught but good to the company at present inhabiting Power's Folly.

They were all in fine spirits at dinner and passed the evening which was too cool to remain out of doors, in playing Loto in the saloon.

"This adventure has positively been the best thing that could have happened to Mrs. Bell," Marie's mother confided to Breck, just before they parted for the night. "It has taken her out of herself, and I feel sure that her health will be permanently benefited by it."

And Breck, for his part, could not but reflect that the casting away of the Starling had wrought naught but good for him, so far as his social standing with the rest of the party was concerned. But, although he was too modest to analyze it in this way for himself, it was not the mere fact of their peculiar situation that had brought this about, but his own courage, manliness and fertility of resource that had made him the one on

whom all the others came to lean in their extremity. Deane might have "filled the bill," had he been worthy, but when the time of trial came he was found wanting.

Brown Elk had improved somewhat since his return to the car and slept quietly through the night, and far into the next morning, as did all the others, owing to the excitements of the previous day. Breck was especially fatigued and there is no knowing how long he might have lain in bed if left undisturbed.

But at nine o'clock he was roused by repeated knockings on his door and Estelle's voice calling: "Mr. Eastman, get up. There's a train of cars just come in."

On hearing this, Breck sprang up as if she had cried "Fire," and not even stopping to look out of the window, got into his clothes with unexampled speed. Inside of ten minutes he was running towards the bluff overlooking the rapids.

And what a spectacle to absorb his attention was that on the other bank! The end of a train of cars, consisting of baggage, passenger, tender, and engine, was backed up almost to the edge of the bluff. The locomotive had just begun blowing off steam with a tremendous racket, and people were swarming from the cars like ants from a hill.

They all made one rush for the river and stood

open-mouthed, gazing at the Starling on the other side.

Breck looked for Syd, but did not see him, and before he could call out, a little man in spectacles, with a soft hat and a pad in his hand hailed him.

"Hello!" he cried. "Which one are you, Eastman or Bell, and have any new developments arisen since that small boy left you yesterday?"

"A reporter already!" thought Breck. "Well, he can just wait. I'm not going to shout myself hoarse when there are more important things on hand for me to attend to."

So he paid no attention to the little man's calls, but proceeded to answer the hails of a tall gentleman in a Derby, evidently superintendent of the road.

The reporter, however, did not seem in the least disconcerted. He coolly seated himself on a bowlder and proceeded to make a sketch of the scene, with Breck well in the foreground.

By this time Marie and Deane had made their appearance, and Marie's quick eye was the first to catch sight of Willie among the throng on the opposite bluff.

"Oh, Willie," she called out, "why didn't you go straight home and relieve your mother's mind about you?"

"They've telegraphed," was Willie's response,

"and I'm going now—on the engine," and the boy's face was radiant.

Meanwhile the superintendent was ordering some railroad hands to get their ropes ready, and presently one of them, a great, tall fellow, with a slouch hat, took a coil on one arm, preparatory to throwing it.

"Are you ready to catch now?" called out the superintendent.

"Yes," answered Breck, and all held their breath for an instant, as the coil shot out in midair, described an arc over the rushing rapids and then shot down again straight into the middle of the river.

"I thought as much," muttered the superintendent, as the long-armed man—none other than Wild Horse Joe, the champion lasso thrower of Colorado, retired, decidedly crestfallen, back among the crowd. "Tom, where did you say we could get some rockets?"

"Over to Fort Garfield," was the reply. "Shall I tell Jack to cut off and run up there for them? It's about an hour's drive from Tipton."

"Yes, and take the small boy with you. And hurry back as quick as you can."

So the locomotive went off, with Willie and Wallace Bond for passengers, and a constantly tooting whistle to warn people off the track. For the news of the wonderful situation of the Starling had spread like

wildfire and sightseers kept tramping in from every direction, eager to catch a glimpse of the now famous car for themselves.

Among those who had come up on the special train from Queen Junction were Wallace Bond and his sister Stella, in charge of Willie, and Miss Harriet Tapper, the pessimistic minded maiden in the shiny hat and green veil, who intimated to the railway officials that the Bells were very dear friends of hers.

"Oh dear!" exclaimed Miss Stella, when the rope fell short, "whatever will those people do to get away now?"

"What did I tell you?" put in Miss Tapper, throwing aside her veil so as to obtain a better view of the little group on the opposite bluff.

"But you don't mean to insist now that they must stay there for always, surely?" went on Miss Bond.

"I'm no Cassandra, to prophecy evil," was the rejoinder, "but there wasn't much hope in the superintendent's face when he sent that man off on the locomotive to get a rocket."

So saying Miss Tapper betook herself to the car with great equanimity, and taking a pad out of her satchel, proceeded to write an exhaustive account of the affair for the New York journal for which she was traveling as correspondent.

Meantime Breck, Deane and Marie had retired to the Starling for breakfast, although so great was the excitement under which they were laboring that they had but little appetite.

"Do you suppose they can get a line across with a rocket, Eastman?" Deane asked, when a full account of proceedings had been given to the ladies.

"I don't see why they shouldn't," replied Breck. "They must send them as far as that from life-saving stations along the coast."

Nevertheless, when the locomotive returned from Tipton, with a supply of rockets from Fort Garfield, the first one fired did not go as far as the rope thrown by Wild Horse Joe, the second fell in the middle of the stream, and none of the rest did any better. Clearly, the Starling's party were not out of the woods yet, even with the oft wished for rescue party close at hand.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

HOW THE PROBLEM WAS SOLVED.

THE day w re on. The engine was attached to the passenger coa h about noon and went off again, carrying a large party of sightseers back to their homes. But fresh arrivals came to take their places, while the un abashed reporter and the female correspondent remained at their posts.

"We've sent to De ver for a stock of larger rockets," the railroad superintendent shouted across to Breck. "We hope to have them here by to-morrow morning. Is your party perfectly comfortable? Will your provisions hold out?"

"Easily, such as they are," returned Breck. "Of course you don't expect to take the car off along with us."

"Well, not exactly. Are there any other telegrams you wish sent besides those you have already given me?"

"I can think of none at present. Only let us know at once when a reply comes from Mr. Bell."

Like the last feather that breaks the camel's back, this time of waiting with rescue so close at hand, dragged more slowly with the Starling's party than had any similar period during their imprisonment. Deane especially was impatient, and took no pains to conceal his feelings either.

"They must be blockheads over there on that other side," he muttered to Breck, as the two strolled along the cliffs late in the afternoon. "Why didn't they bring everything that could possibly come in useful on the first trip? All they seem capable of doing is staring. I declare I feel exactly as though I was some pink-eyed, woolly-headed fellow in a dime museum. But what's that chap doing over there, with all those newspapers? See, there's a young lady helping him."

Both boys approached nearer the edge, in order to look more closely at that which had attracted Deane's attention.

"Hello," called out the young man in question—none other than our friend Wallace Bond—when he happened to look up and notice that he was being observed, "I'm going to see what I can do for you with a kite."

"By George, good for you," shouted Deane, impet-

uously. "Wonder nobody thought of that before. How near is it finished?"

"About half. I want to hurry with it because the breeze is blowing directly towards you now. It will probably fall with sunset, and then, you see, the kite will drop over on your island."

The boys became much interested in this work, and Deane hastened off to tell Marie about it. She accompanied him back to the bluff and soon got into conversation, *albeit* of necessity a screaming one, with Stella Bond.

"My brother wanted to stay and see how his kite idea came out," she explained. "We brought a hamper of lunch along and are going back to stay at Queen's Junction to-night. We're on our way home from California."

The kite was finished at four o'clock, rose gracefully in the air, and sailed directly over Power's Folly, as Wallace had predicted it would. All watched it breathlessly, but the breeze was so strong that for an hour it soared clear above the heads of the imprisoned tourists.

Breck and Dean forgot all about supper, in the intensity of their eagerness to capture the newspaper link that would deliver them from their captivity. Several times Wallace tried to bring the kite within

their reach by running backwards with the string, but the wind was still too strong for him.

At last, however, the cord ceased its quivering, lower and lower fluttered the kite, till at length it descended within reach of Breck's hands, and he, being the taller, succeeded in grasping it ahead of Deane.

Then what a cheer went up! Even Miss Tapper's grim visage relaxed into a smile, as she hastily produced her camera to photograph the scene, while the little newspaper man scribbled away so fast that he scarcely took time to look.

Rapidly but carefully the boys hauled in on the kite string, and presently a stouter cord was running through their fingers, this followed by a rope strong enough to bear the weight of a man.

One great problem in the work of rescue had been solved. It now remained to make this solution of practical utility.

"We can't go over on that rope, if you boys can, which I doubt," Marie said, "so I don't see as we're much better off than we were before. But what is that thing they're bringing out now?"

"That must be what might be called an inland breeches buoy," Breck replied, and just then he received a hail from the superintendent, requesting him to be ready to receive the queer-looking contrivance

which the men had been busy all the afternoon in putting together.

The upper part was formed of a horse's collar, from which depended a bag-like arrangement, made of stout rubber. This was fastened to the rope over the chasm by two rings, to one of which was attached a line by which it could be pulled back from the island plateau.

To send it over, one of the men simply mounted the roof of the freight car and let it run down the slant in the rope thus formed.

"Now make your end of the line securely fast to the Starling," the superintendent called out, "and send over your first passenger."

The excitement was intense on both sides of the river.

Mrs. Bell, Mrs. Granville, Estelle, all of the private car party except Brown Elk, were gathered around the Starling's rear platform.

"Now who will go first?" asked Breck. "One of the ladies of course."

"You must go, Aunt Gertrude," added Marie. "You're the hostess, you know."

But Mrs. Bell shrank back, and actually, now that the opportunity had come, seemed loath to leave the island.

"I can take nothing but a hand satchel with me,"

she said, "and we were so comfortable in the Starling. Who knows but the sheets of the Queen Junction Hotel will be damp and we'll all catch our death of cold?"

It was finally settled that Marie should be the first to leave, but there was a good deal of delay, while she went to her room in the Starling and decided on what things she would take along. Finally she declared herself ready, and stepping fearlessly into the "safety sack," rested her arms on the horse collar, then motioned to Breck to give the signal.

"Oh, I never can make up my mind to trust myself over those rapids in that way," cried Mrs. Bell, as she watched her niece's progress across the ravine.

But Marie seemed not in the least terrified, and kept waving her hand as well as she could till she reached the other side.

The cheer that announced when this fact was accomplished completely dwarfed all other applause that had been given that day, and did much to inspire Mrs. Bell with confidence in the air line route.

Indeed, she seemed eager for the sack to come back that she might start, and behaved very creditably during the passage.

Mrs. Granville followed her, then Estelle, and after her Deane.

By the latter Breck sent a message to the superintendent regarding the transportation of Brown Elk. The Indian had taken a turn for the worse during the day, and his shoulder was in such a condition that it would be cruelty to move him without a stretcher. Could one be provided, Breck instructed Deane to inquire, also whether there was a doctor among the crowd on the other bluff.

The superintendent himself went over to the plateau to look into the matter and returned with the report that the Indian was too ill to be removed that night.

"That noble fellow Eastman volunteers to stay with him till morning, by which time I can get back here with some sort of stretcher and a doctor."

This was the announcement the superintendent made when he returned, and was followed by the offer of Wallace Bond to go over and stay with Breck.

"I'm a student of medicine," he said, "and perhaps can be of some service."

"Thank you," said the superintendent. "I will send you over at once."

CHAPTER XXXV.

NEWSPAPER HEROES.

Mrs. Bell, Marie, her mother, Deane and Estelle boarded the train and were whirled off to Queen Junction behind another locomotive which had been sent up with fresh supplies late in the afternoon. And one would have thought they had just returned from a sojourn in Mars, or some other one of the planets, judging by the curiosity with which they were regarded.

Miss Tapper possessed herself of Mrs. Bell at once, and nearly drove that poor lady distracted by the flood of questions she poured out upon her. The reporter found a ready victim in Deane; but when that young gentleman had finished with the relation of all the adventures that had befallen him during his exile, coloring all the incidents, from that of the runaway down to the capture by the Indian, to su-

himself, it was an open question whether the victim in the case was not the reporter after all.

Stella Bond and Marie became great friends at once, and during that short ride to Queen Junction the former heard more about Breck than her brother learned during his night's stay with Eastman himself.

When the train ran into the station there was an enormous crowd there ready to receive it and endeavor to obtain a peep at the individuals whom, for over a week, the world had believed to be at the bottom of the turbulent river. Indeed, so dense was the throng that it was as much as the railroad officials could do to force a path across the street to the hotel.

Here Mrs. Bell found a dispatch from her husband awaiting her, stating that he had been on the eve of sailing for Europe, adding that he would start for Queen Junction at once, and requesting her to await his arrival there. There were also messages for Mrs. Granville, Marie and Breck.

The latter meanwhile was having a "picnic in a palace" with Wallace Bond. At least that is what the latter termed it. For on his trip across the chasm he took with him a beefsteak, some potatoes, and a can o milk, and after making the Indian as comfortable as possible, the two young fellows pro-

ceeded to get up a dinner which should atone to Breck for his long deprivation of fresh meat.

Wallace was a pretty good cook, having officiated in that capacity at no end of camping out parties. And with the facilities afforded by the Starling's perfectly appointed kitchen, he declared that the work was mere child's play.

He was delighted with the car and declared that he shouldn't think the party would have been very unhappy during their exile. In short, Breck found him to be a most genial fellow and the two sat up talking until far into the night.

"I'll be a hero to all my friends when I get home for this night's experience," Wallace affirmed, just as they were retiring. "But I say, all this elegance will have to be left here, won't it, unless they build another bridge, and that would seem hardly worth while, simply to admit of the passage of one car."

"I have an idea, though," rejoined Breck, "that our experience here may tend to revive the fortunes of the Inland Island House. In that case the rebuilding of the bridge will be the least expense to be incurred."

The next morning, thanks to the treatment given him by young Bond, Brown Elk was much improved, and when the railroad superintendent ar-

rived at ten o'clock with a stretcher, the Indian was transported across the river very comfortably.

As soon as Breck stepped out of the "safety sack" he was handed the dispatch, which Marie's forethought had caused to be sent up to him. It was from his mother, and told of the joy unbounded that pervaded the little cottage when his own telegram had been received.

"When may we expect you home?" were the words with which it closed.

This question, of course, Breck could not answer until he had consulted Mrs. Bell, for he still considered himself under engagement to her husband.

On reaching Queen Junction Brown Elk was conveyed to a hospital, where Mrs. Bell afterward visited him and arranged that he should have the best of care.

Mr. Bell was expected by the end of the week, till which time the party rested quietly at the hotel, recovering from the nervous strain to which they had been subjected. We say quietly, but it was only by the most persistent vigilance on the part of Breck and Deane that this repose was secured for the ladies. It seemed as if the newspaper reporters of the whole country had flocked to Queen Junction for the express purpose of interviewing Mrs. Bell, while artists for the illustrated papers, to say nothing of the amateur

fiend with his camera, lay in wait at all hours on the chance of "capturing" a view of the hostess of the Starling.

As has been hinted, Deane rather enjoyed the notoriety he had achieved, and now has a scrap book containing newspaper portraits of himself, no two of which resemble one another.

"There's one good thing about it," he confided to Breck. "It saves us the trouble of writing a detailed account of our experiences to our friends. They got it all much sooner by telegraph in the daily papers."

The Bonds left for New York the day after the liberation of the party, and Miss Tapper took passage by the same train, with the avowed intention of trying to worm out of Miss Stella any unpublished items of interest pertaining to the Power's Folly experience which Marie might have imparted to her.

Mr. Bell reached the Junction Saturday night, and what his emotions were, on this reunion with those he had supposed lost to him in this world forever, we must leave our readers to imagine for themselves. There are some scenes too sacred and touching for pen to depict.

He had a long interview with Breck, from which that young man came forth with a glad sparkle in his eye and a flush on his cheek that modesty, not shame, had brought there. The reason for this we

shall ascertain by reading a sentence or two from a letter he wrote that night to his mother:

"We are to start for home on Monday. I am to have till September to rest, and then Mr. Bell will take me into his Philadelphia office, in the account department, at a salary to begin with of $15 per week, the pay for my present position to run on till I take up with the new one. Deane and I are warm friends now. He has had a good deal of the "upstartism" knocked out of him by his rough experiences of the past ten days."

Breck accompanied Mr. Bell to Power's Folly, and before leaving the Junction the merchant arranged that a trestlework should be built, over which the Starling could be run and brought back to Philadelphia. The proprietor of the hotel at Queen Junction was very anxious for Mr. Bell to join him in refurnishing the Inland Island House and booming the place once more for a summer resort. But Mr. Bell declared most emphatically that he had had all the connection he desired with the place, and that, when his car was once removed, never wanted to hear of it again.

Breck went to see Brown Elk on Sunday afternoon. He found him so much improved that he was planning to rejoin his tribe early in the week. He ex-

pressed himself as deeply grateful for all that had been done for him, and Breck believed him to be sincere in this.

The party left Queen Junction Monday afternoon, and after an uneventful trip across the continent arrived at Philadelphia on Friday. Here Mrs. Granville and Marie left them, but not before Breck had promised to come to their cottage at Monmouth Beach to spend at least ten days of his holiday. Then the others took the afternoon Express for Crescent.

It seemed that the entire population of the town must have been at the station to welcome them. Breck's school friends were out in force, but when they beheld their hero and Deane Bell descend from the car in smiling converse, the shock of the surprise was so great that Laird Grayland forgot to lead off in the cheer he had proposed they should give, an omission which Breck only too readily overlooked.

"Here, just let me paw you over a bit, Eastman," said Rob Kenton, when Breck, after giving five minutes to his mother and Helen, turned to his chums. "I can't realize yet that you're not a ghost. Why, I've got your obituary, from the *Crescent Chronicle* pasted in my scrap book at home? You just ought to read it. But don't you fell queer? Why don't you write a story for one of the syndicates, and call it 'Ten Days Dead, or Called Back'?"

"Why, haven't you seen enough about me in print already?" rejoined Breck laughingly, as he started to rejoin his mother and sister. "Besides, how can you expect a fellow to write a story after his obituary has been published?"

THE END.